

# 1 Corinthians – A Commentary

*Conduct: Devoid of Selfishness . . . Developed in Selflessness*

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# 1 Corinthians

## Introduction

Pride and selfishness are the heads and tails of the same coin. Pride, for example, claims self-importance as its primary focus. The flipside, of course, is selfishness.

Selflessness, on the other hand, stands in stark contrast to the above and is rooted in sacrificial concern for the welfare and benefit of others. It is devoid of arrogance and a haughty spirit.

The primary thrust of 1 Corinthians pivots or circulates around these opposing forces. Regardless of the reality of Christian liberty, if such liberty does not operate in the realm of concern for the welfare and benefit of others, that liberty does not fall in the confines of conduct which 1 Corinthians defines and delineates. In fact, it creates divisions and degradations which deny the Christian faith.

In this letter, Paul provides principles which penetrate beneath the surface of the sacredness of marriage, the delicacy of eating sacrificial meats, and the significance of worship. He ties these principles to the resurrection of Christ and Christians, as well as several other concluding matters of pragmatic importance.

## The City of Corinth

The city in which the church was located was a rather large, “thriving city of approximately 600,000 inhabitants” (Berquist, 2). Today its population is approximately 38,000. The ancient city, dating back perhaps to the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Madvig, 772), was on the Isthmus or land bridge of Corinth and was only a few miles wide. All travel between Southern and Northern Greece passed through it.

The city of Corinth was captured and destroyed by the Roman army in 146 B.C. It was rebuilt as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. and was the administrative capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

Throughout the then-known world, Corinth had a reputation which was not admirable by any stretch of the imagination. Moral corruption was rampant in religious practices and otherwise. It was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles from all around the geographical area who prided themselves on their pride of possessions, gods and goddesses, wisdom, clever but deceitful reasonings, argumentative tactics, and pleasures of any sort. As E. F. Scott notes (127), “it seemed like madness to come with the gospel of Christ into this center of heathen materialism and immorality.” “‘To live like a Corinthian’ was a proverbial expression for dissolute living” (Gilmour, 685) or “immorality” (cf. 5:1-13; 6:12-20)” (Brown, 288).

## The Church at Corinth

The majority of first century Christians in Corinth, as well as elsewhere in the Roman Empire, had backgrounds which were steeped in various religions. Judaism, Greek and Roman gods and goddesses (polytheism), and Egyptian cults were saturated with multiple forms of mythology (legends or stories with religious beliefs which usually sprang from unknown sources).

ces and origins) which became embedded in the consciences and cultures of these areas. “The fusion of believers with differing religious backgrounds caused uncertainty and conflict over acceptable beliefs and practices within Christian communities” (Byler, 38).

An older book which traces the impact of Judaism and Hellenism on the New Testament is H.E. Dana’s *The New Testament World: A Brief Sketch of the History and Conditions which Composed the Background of the New Testament*. But there are many others.

A more recent writing reveals how the conflict between Judaism and Christianity was especially strong. After all, the Christian faith was early seen as a spinoff of Judaism. So, in her collection of essays in the book, “*Neither Jew Nor Greek*”: *Constructing Early Christianity*, Judith M. Lieu explores how Judaism helped form and shape the identity of Christianity in the context of Judaism, and even the broader impact of other Graeco-Roman influences prior to 200 A.D. In evaluating key questions in the light of non-Biblical literary sources, the role of women receives unique attention. The impact of such essays on 1 Corinthians signals a must for reading this collection of materials.

Therefore, once again, when converts to Christianity waded into its waters,

they brought with them beliefs and behaviors rooted in their past religious experiences. Whether they were originally a part of the Diaspora Jewish community or one of many polytheistic or henotheistic cults, all members of the early Christian community converted from another religious construct, and the integration of people from different religious backgrounds raised questions about what was proper practice for Christians. (Byler, 40-41).

According to Acts 18, Paul founded the church in Corinth and had spent two years with them. He founded the church on the foundation of Christ and any disturbances in this regard must be addressed with immediacy and intensity. In fact, “no church caused him more anxiety than did Corinth (II Cor. 11:28)” (Robertson, 67).

If ever there was a culture of corrupt customs and conduct which raised immense challenges to the Christian faith, look no farther than this city itself. In fact, Paul brings to the forefront of his purpose in writing the necessity to address spillover problems from the city which could not be permitted to infiltrate and saturate the conduct of Christians: the pursuit of worldly wisdom – as seen in quarrelings and discord; spiritual pride; marital regulations; eating of sacrificial meats; legal disputes; the Lord’s Supper; spiritual gifts; Christian liberty; the resurrection of Christ and Christians; and problems in corporate worship. So, the message to this first century church remains relevant for the church today.

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## I Corinthians - Commentary

### I DESIGNATIONS (1:1-9)

#### A. Salutation (1:1-3)

Paul opens his correspondence with the Corinthian Christians in concert with the common practice of the day: the author (v. 1), the audience (v. 2), the assertion (v. 3). However, he adds features to each component which signify the spiritual nature or temperature within his writing.

V. 1: “Paul a called apostle of Christ Jesus through [the] will of God and Sosthenes the brother”

Paul immediately notifies his readers that he is not only an “apostle” but a “called” one. The word “called” (*kletos*) is an adjective which describes more fully the qualitative nature of his apostleship. It was not a self-appointment but a “called” one. This word also occurs in v. 2, 24. It is found elsewhere in the NT: Mt. 20:16; 22:14; Rom. 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28; Jude 1; Rev. 17:14. It is used as “a verb and noun for Christians in Rom. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:24; Jude 1; Rev. 17:14. As a noun it is to be explained in the same way as *kaleo* and *klesis* – the latter word occurring 11 times in the NT for ‘call, calling’: Rom 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:26; 7:20; Eph. 1:18; 4:1, 4; Phil. 3:14; 2 Thes. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1; 2 Pt. 1:10” (Schmidt, 494).

The words “of Christ Jesus” denote that it was Christ Jesus Who did the calling and/or appointment.

In order to further highlight the divine disposition of his apostleship, Paul declares that this appointment was in accordance with and through the agency of God’s will. Even though he was not one of the original twelve apostles, the fact that all of them were “called” by the same God underscores his ability and right to an apostleship which was not of human initiative or origin and was likewise filled with divine authority to speak as God’s representative.

This “Sosthenes” whom Paul designates as “the brother” is likely the same Sosthenes mentioned in Acts 18:17 as the chief ruler of the synagogue in Corinth. He, obviously, became a Christian at some time subsequent to the beating he received. These are the only two occurrences of his name in the NT.

V. 2: “to the church of God which is in Corinth, having been set apart for consecration [to God] in Christ Jesus, called consecrated ones, together with all those who are calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place – theirs and ours”

The audience to whom the author directs his writing is now specified: “the church of God which is in Corinth.”

The word “church” (*ekklesia*) denotes those ‘called out’ of- the-world-ones to serve God while in the world. It occurs 21 other times in this letter: 4:17; 6:4; 7:17; 10:32; 11:16, 18, 22; 12:28; 14:4, 5, 12, 19; 23, 28, 33, 34, 35; 15:9; 16:1, 19 (twice).

The addition “of God” indicates that they belong to God, not to any special interests groups, factions, or individuals (as some will claim in v. 12).

The basis for this unique status of the non-worldly-ones is that have been ‘set apart for consecration’ and remain in that state of separation which is denoted by the Perfect tense verb which indicates an existing state of reality. The passive voice of the verb indicates that it was God Who brought about this separation of consecration. This was a fact which was fading, however, behaviorally.

But, even in the immoral city of “Corinth” the church still belongs to God and is to represent Him in ways which are moral and indicative of His character and call for others to be like Him. As Brown (298) accurately claims, “it is a community of commitment.” This commitment is a Spirit-led determination that shows no signs of defeat or retreat. It is commitment without reservation. However, “in too many ways they look far more *like* Corinth than they do God’s holy people *in* Corinth” (Fee, 33) – thus, the need for this corrective correspondence.

This aspect of commitment is stirringly set forth by Elton Trueblood in his book, *The Company of the Committed*. As noted on his front flap, “Despite the popularity of churchgoing, millions are only back-pew Christians. What is needed is a task force of committed men and women who truly care for God, for the church, and for other people. Such a ‘valiant band for Christ’ would revitalize the church and transform society.” This book – as well as all others by Trueblood – is imperative reading for those with serious attention to God and His Church.

Paul is careful to record that this separation from the world’s standards and practices takes place in the sphere of or in connection with Christ Jesus. Neither the Corinthians nor anyone else (including Jews) are physically born as ‘consecrated ones.’ This consecration or separation to God is brought about by a new birth from above – “by virtue of an act of God in Jesus, the consequences of which last till the present” (Grosheide, 23).

In further describing his audience, Paul uses the same word he used in v. 1 for describing his apostleship to now depict them: “‘called’ (*keltois*) consecrated ones.” The word translated “consecrated ones” is *hagios* and is often translated “saints” (KJV, NAS), which is an accurate translation. But since this English translation may be misunderstood to indicate one who has wings and walks 4 inches off the ground without any degree of sinful tendencies, it may be wiser to capture the meaning of the word with another word, as here. Williams also prefers “consecrated.” Beck translates “holy,” another accurate word, but it too may convey meaning which is not well understood in English.

Paul’s additional descriptive phrase provides meaningful insights about his audience, “together with all those who are calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place – theirs and ours.” As Barrett (34) notes, “all Christians

share a common holiness because they share a common Lord.” Indeed, the words “together with” (*sun*) and “all” (*pasin*) create the tone for the association or unity which exists between all Christians wherever they may be located geographically, as the words “in every place” imply. That is, “Paul starts by giving them a gentle nudge to remind them that their own calling to be God’s people belongs to a much larger picture . . . to have a share with all the saints, fellow believers ‘in every place’ who also ‘call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’” (Fee, 33).

This was a fact which those even in Corinth itself needed to know. And the one noted facet of this association or unity is captured in the words “those calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The word “calling upon” (*epikaloumenois*) is a Present tense, middle voice participle which conveys the mutual actions being practiced by all the consecrated ones. It means “to confess faith in Him” (Bruce, 30). Vincent (186) says “it is used of worship, and here implies prayer to Christ.” Leon Morris (35) says that this “is an unusual way of describing Christians (albeit a readily intelligible one). It’s importance is that in the Old Testament it is the name of Jehovah upon which men call. [Thus] the highest place is being assigned to Christ.”

Robertson (69) thinks that the words “theirs and ours” have an intensive effect in “showing the universality of Christ.”

V. 3: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.

In this customary greeting of Paul, Peter, and John where “*grace* is the unexpected and undeserved generosity of God and *peace* is life in harmony with the purpose of God” (Brown, 298), “we have here the earliest Christian password” (Findlay, 759). Indeed, “nothing is deserved; nothing can be achieved” (Fee, 35).

The Christocentric nature of this salutation is also clear: Paul is an apostle of *Christ Jesus*; the Corinthians are set apart/sanctified in *Christ Jesus*; all Christians call on the name of our Lord *Jesus Christ*; grace and peace come our Lord *Jesus Christ*.

Plus, Grosheide (25) claims that “the distinguishing feature of this salutation is its stress upon the sanctity of the church.” So, as the body of Christ, even in this mixed-up city of Corinth – *an ancient conglomeration of New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas* - the behavior of the body must be reoriented to resemble and reflect the Head. Sanctity is not optional.

#### B. Statements of Gratitude (1:4-9)

V. 4: “I am always giving thanks to my God for you upon the basis of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus”

The present tense verb, “I am giving thanks” and its qualifier, “always,” indicates Paul’s constant attitude of gratitude for them. However, he could be misunder-

stood by some of his readers, as if he was trying to curry favor with some of the individuals or groups in the church. This was a possibility which was already in motion as seen in verses 12-13.

So, he quickly sets the record straight by adding that his continual gratitude was anchored in “the grace of God given to you [*humin*: plural] in Christ Jesus.”

The word translated “upon the basis of” (*epi*) God’s grace means not in general and “not a virtue of God but the manifestation thereof” (Grosheide, 27). The precise and specific manifestation of this grace occurred exclusively “in Christ Jesus,” the only sphere in which God’s grace is expressed and experienced.

The word “in” (*en*) clarifies this matter without hesitation or equivocation. There can be no participation in God’s grace apart from Christ Jesus. Being in union with Him is “the ground and condition of [their] new life” (Parry, 31). Their new “state of living [is] under the influence of, and governed by, the redemption and reconciliation of man effected by Jesus Christ” (Robertson and Plummer, 5).

There is no room for legitimate debate or controversy about this truth, and those controversies which arose in the church were due to doubts, disputations, debates and controversies over questioning this truth.

V. 5: “that in all things you have been enriched in Him, in sufficient ability of expressing [your testimony of Christ] and sufficient knowledge [of Him]”

The verb “enriched” (*eploutisthete*) occurs only two other times in the NT: 2 Cor. 6:10; 9:11. This enrichment is seen in the fact that they had “sufficient ability of expressing their testimony about Christ and had sufficient knowledge about Him.” Obviously, they stood, however, in need of more – like we all do. Even though knowledge typically precedes speech, the general tendency is to discover one’s knowledge by one’s speech.

A.T. Robertson (70) notes that the church in Corinth “was a marvellously endowed church in spite of their perversions.”

V. 6: “even as the testimony concerning Christ has been proven to be true in you”

The word translated “testimony” (*marturion*) may be translated “witness, proof, evidence.” Archibald Robertson and Plummer (6) suggest it means “the witness borne [by our preaching] to Christ, the witness borne by the Scriptures to Christ, and also of the witness borne *by* Christ, who is the *archimartus* through His death [Origen].” Vincent (187) simply says, “testimony concerning Christ.” The verb translated “has been proven to be true” (*ebebaiothe*) relates to the testimony about Christ which has “received a firm place in, or among, the Corinthians” (Grosheide. 28). In other words, it “was confirmed in them” (Bengel, 167) - they accepted and affirmed what they heard, and were enriched by it (v. 5).



V. 7: “so that you are not in need of any spiritual gift, while waiting for the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ”

This is the first mention of “spiritual gift” (*charismati*) in this letter but certainly not the last: cp. 7:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31.

Despite the troubles in the church, they had “at their disposal all that God bestows on men (Rom. 8:32); and it may reasonably be said that the troubles in Corinth were due not to a deficiency of gifts but to lack of proportion and balance in estimating and using them” (Barrett, 38).

So, even though the Corinthians are already enjoying the past promises of God in the present, and are loaded, though misusing their gifts, they also “were patiently and eagerly waiting for the greater promise of the unfolding future” (Ellicott, 8). This was, indeed, “the object of lively expectation on the part of the earliest Christians” (Bruce, 31). Cp. 4:5; 15:23.

It is true that their excitement and concentration was now-focused, but they also realized that “the present is still incomplete” (Barrett, 39).

V. 8: “Who shall also prove you to be true fully blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”

The word translated “prove to be true” (*bebaiosei*) is the same word first used in v. 6.

The word translated “blameless” (*enegkletous*) may also be translated “vindicated” (Williams), “accuse” (Beck), “unreproveable” (Robertson). Plummer and Robertson (7) state, “the word implies, not actual freedom from sins, but yet a state of spiritual renewal (2:12ff; Phil. 1:10; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:1), so that they are “unimpeachable, for none will have the right to impeach (Rom. 8:33; Col. 1:22, 28)” (Ibid.).

“The day of our Lord Jesus Christ” is the same as the OT day of Jehovah. Paul here transforms that OT day into the day of Christ “since God has revealed His purpose to ‘judge through Jesus Christ (Rom. 2:16; Acts 17:31)” (Findlay, 761). Simply stated, Jesus Christ is Judge. Cp. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16. 2 Thes. 2:2.

V. 9: “God is faithful, through Whom you have been called into partnership with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord”

The words “God is faithful” is more than just a generalization about the ability to depend upon God. Here it “confirms *de kai bebaiosei* [v. 8] = God can be trusted to carry through what He has begun” (Parry, 33).

The verb “called” (*eklethete*) occurs also in 7:15, 17, 18 [twice], 20, 21, 22 [twice], 24; 10:27; 15:9. It is found in every NT writing except 2 Cor., Phil., Titus, 2 and 3 John, and Jude.

The word “partnership” (*koinonian*) is a better translation of this word than “fellowship.” The word occurs 2 other times in this letter: 10:16 [twice]. It occurs elsewhere in the NT: Acts 2:42; Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 6:14; 8:4; 9:13; 13:14; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 3:9; Phil. 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; Philemon 6; Heb. 13:16; 1 Jn. 1:3 [twice], 6, 7.

Hauch (798) says it means “participation, impartation; community of possession or communal possession.” Findlay (762) calls it “*collective participation*” or “into communion belonging to (and named after) God’s Son, of which *He* is founder, centre and sum.” Morris (38) states it is “fellowship with Christ.” The New English Bible translates, “God Who called you to share in the life of his Son.” As Goudge (5) notes, this “fellowship of Christ includes not only fellowship with Christ, but fellowship with all who are in union with Him.” Ellicott (11) elaborates: It is “fellowship in Him and with Him . . . not only the fellowship resulting from adoption (Gal. 3:26) and spiritual union with Christ in this life, but also and more especially that fellowship with our Lord in His glory (comp. Rom. 8:21) which will be vouchsafed to His faithful servants in the world to come.” Ellicott’s broad-spectrum may be supported in light of the *divisions* to be confronted in 1:10-4:21.

## II DIVISIONS (1:10-4:21)

### A. Senseless Arguments (1:10-17)

V. 10: “Now I am exhorting you, fellow believers, by means of the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all [of] you may keep on speaking the same things and there may be no more continually opposing groups among you, but there may be a state of complete harmony in the same state of mind and opinion”

“I exhort” (*parakalo*) is a present tense verb indicating Paul’s continuous action of urging, exhorting, begging, encouraging, asking, appealing to his fellow believers to adopt an appropriate response to his action. However, the basis for his action does not reside in himself as the founder of the church but “by means of the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word translated “authority” (*tou onomat-os*) may be translated “name,” but it means “authority, power, status” and is so here translated because they are followers of Christ and should reflect that following in accordance with Paul’s specifications.

Instead of “speaking the same things” they were speaking from their fractional mindsets (cp. v. 12-13), both creating and revealing discord and divisions. Instead of friendly and communal relations, they were echoing fractional biases and prejudices. Paul declares that these opposing groups be terminated or aborted and not allowed to continue or proliferate.

The verb “complete harmony” (*katertismenoi*) is a perfect tense participle indicating a complete and existing state of harmony. “Paul’s meaning is clear: he

wants to persuade the Corinthians to end their factionalism and be reconciled as one community” (Mitchell, 75). Indeed, the word means to be “put back into their proper state” (Barrett, 42).

The terms “mind and opinion” “include the ideas of counsel and choice. Together these two expressions embrace volition as well as cognition” (Blomberg, 43).

V. 11: “For it has been made clear to me, my fellow believers, by those of Chloe’s [household] that there are quarrels/quarrelings among you”

This is the only mention of “Chloe” in the NT. Speculations as to her identity are avoided in this commentary since speculations do not arise from revelations. Nevertheless, some who either knew her or were connected with her in some type relationship had clearly communicated to Paul that there were “quarrels” (*erides*) or strifes or selfish rivalries taking place in the church which apparently contributed to the divisions. Cognitive-Emotional issues had been aroused. Combativeness, provocativeness, defiance, cantankerousness, and contentions were consequential. It could not be allowed to continue or escalate.

The word *erides* occurs one other time in this letter: 3:3. It also occurs in Rom. 1:29; 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Phil. 1:3; 1 Tim. 6:4; Tit. 3:9.

V. 12: “So, this is what I mean: each of you is saying, *I am indeed of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, and I am of Christ.*’

Each faction had their favorite hero to whom they yielded their allegiance.

Each faction regarded itself as superior to the others.

Each faction fragmented the Christian faith further and further away from its divinely oriented framework.

Paul, of course, was the founder of the church and as such, he held immense popularity and power with a segment of the saints.

Apollos is first mentioned in the NT in Acts 18:24 and then in 19:1. His name occurs again in this letter: 3:4, 5, 6, 22; 4:6; 16:12. He is also mentioned in Titus 3:13. He arrived in Corinth sometime after Paul left the city. As an eloquent man who was fervent in spirit, he soon watered what Paul had planted. Some in the church soon contrasted his eloquence with the plainness of Paul. “Preference readily passed into partianship” (Ellicott, 16).

Cephas is the Aramaic name which Jesus gave to Simon and means Peter (Jn. 1:42). There appears little to no evidence that Cephas had ever been to Corinth. Robertson (74) claims that “Judaizers came and pitted Peter against Paul to the Corinthian church on the basis of Paul’s rebuke of Peter in Antioch (cp. Acts 15:7-11; Gal. 2:7-14). These Judaizers made bitter personal attacks on Paul in return for their defeat at the Jerusalem Conference.” Obviously, some in the church accepted as factual the falsity of Judaizers’ claims.

The fourth faction claimed to have Christ as their hero. This was either formed in reaction against the other three with a sense of superiority or was a genuine

attempt to jostle the others into realization of the regenerative allegiance reserved only for Christ Himself. In light of the following verse, it appears that the former position is more likely the case.

V. 13: “Does Christ stand in a state of division? Paul was not crucified for you was he? No. Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

If Christ stood in a state of division, then He could or would be “broken up into different” (Vincent, 190) parties by these quarrels or controversies. So, no one group may exclusively claim Him as their hero or leader, as the latter group apparently tended to do.

Paul, in the form of an interrogative which expects the answer no, declares that he was not crucified for any of them. Furthermore, none of them had been baptized in his name, as if any allegiance thereby could have been owed him.

V. 14: “I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius.”

In order to strengthen his case against the potential allegiance toward himself as a result of baptizing people, he renders gratitude that this simply could not have been possible. The only people he baptized were the two earliest converts in Corinth: Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8), and Gaius (Rom. 16:23). Paul “is not striving to devalue baptism but to correct the over-emphasis some Corinthians place on it” (Brown, 301).

V. 15: “in order that no one may say ‘you have been baptized in my name.’”

This phrase or “clause describes, not the reason why he had baptised so few, but the reason why he is mentioning the fact now” (Parry, 38).

Paul, of course, would never have baptized in his own name, but in the hedonistic environment in Corinth, it would have been relatively “easy for sub-Christian ideas of the sacrament to enter the church” (Barrett, 48).

V. 16: “O, I baptized also the household of Stephanas; I do not recall if I baptized any others.”

In 16:15, Paul calls him and his family “the first-fruits of Achaia.” They were “clearly a family that justifies Paul’s personal attention about baptism” (Robertson, 75). Moule (161) suggests, “*I do not know that I baptized anybody else besides.*”

Again, Paul is certainly not seeking to diminish the importance of baptism in some sort of general way. After all, in Rom. 6:2-6, he unhesitatingly refers to baptism as symbolically portraying new life in Christ.

V. 17: “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to gospelize, not in wisdom

of a word, in order that the cross of Christ may not be depleted.”

As if to underscore his perspective on baptism and the bungling nature of it which some in Corinth had created, he prioritizes the importance of preaching the gospel, his primary role as an apostle and visionary.

The word “wisdom” (*sophia*) occurs 16 other times in this letter: 1:19, 20, 21 [twice], 22, 24, 30; 2:1, 4, 5, 6 [twice], 7, 13; 3:19; 12:8. It occurs only one time in 2 Cor. – 1:12. It is used of man-centered wisdom and God-centered wisdom “and must be understood in each context in which it is found” (Brown, 305).

Horsley (46) thinks that *sophia logou* (“wisdom of a word” – which he translates “eloquent wisdom”) was the basis or root of the divisions in Corinth. In his own words, “in Paul’s day, eloquent speech was of special importance in public discourse and entertainment and was also associated with other marks of high social standing” (Ibid.). Knox translates, “an orator’s cleverness.” This, in itself, of course, would be antithetical to the message of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. As Watson (8) so pointedly puts it: as far as the cross of Christ is concerned, “there can be no room for pyrotechnic display of rhetorical virtuosity such as were offered by traveling sophists who could be heard in the market places of any Mediterranean city. Such oratorical skill would leave his hearers gaping at his cleverness and rob the cross of its force.”

The word translated “depleted” (*apollumenois*) means “to destroy, lose, die, pass away, kill.” It indicates “to impair its substance” (Archibald Robertson and Plummer, 16) by any merger of these two opposing kinds of wisdom.

There are no forms of mere human cleverness or publicly impressive displays of speech with which to capture the hearts and minds of hearers and mitigate or take the place of the divinely transforming message of the gospel of Christ. If the full power of the gospel was to be delivered and experienced, it must be “delivered with absolute directness and simplicity. These words form a transition to the next section” (Goudge, 7).

## B. Scriptural Alternative (1:18-31)

V. 18: “For the word of the cross is abject foolishness to those who are in the process of being destroyed [by sin’s dominion], but to those who are in the process of being delivered [from sin’s dominion] it is [the] ability of God [to provide that deliverance]”

Paul transitions from “a word” of eloquence by skilled orators to “the word” of evangelization by scriptural oracles. The word here translated “the word” (*ho logos*) is translated “preaching” (KJV), “message” (Williams, Knox, TCNT), “story” (Beck, Moffatt), and “discourse” (Rotherham).

Whichever translation may be preferred, it is clear that it is the message about the sacrificial act of God on Calvary which is the focus. This focus inevitably leads to one of two consequences: (1) it is regarded as “abject foolishness” (*moria*), or (2) absolute fruitfulness.

With regard to (1), the present tense participle (*apollumenois*) indicates that this message is regarded by some as “abject foolishness” because – or which reveals that - they are already in the process of being destroyed. The passive voice indicates that it is “God Himself Who exercises the supremely active function of Judge” (Oepke, 396) in bringing about this “eternal destruction” (Ibid, 395).

If this verb is a middle voice, then it indicates that those who regard this message as “abject foolishness” are in the process of “destroying themselves” by their refusal to yield to God’s ability to deliver them from sin’s dominion.

With regard to (2), the present tense participle (*sozomenois*) indicates that this message is regarded by some as recognizing it as God’s ability to deliver them from sin’s dominion and resulting absolute fruitfulness for His glory.

This *deliverance from sin’s dominion* is the essential meaning of the popular word “salvation.” It is the dynamic process of God’s ability which involves the past [deliverance from the penalty of sin]; the present [deliverance from the power of sin]; and the future [deliverance from the presence of sin].

No other word, no other message, no other preaching, no other story, no other discourse contains this dynamic of God. “God’s power is shown in the preaching of the Cross of Christ through all the ages, now as always. No other preaching wins men and women from sin to holiness or can save them” (Robertson, 77).

After all, “it is the spiritual power of the Gospel, rather than its wisdom, that he wishes to emphasise” (Goudge, 9). This major idea is reenforced, reinvigorated and elaborated in vs. 19-31.

V. 19: “For it stands written, **‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and I will invalidate the insight of the intelligent.’**”

The first plank of puncturing the pride of mere human wisdom is laid in this quotation from Isaiah 29:14. “The context denounces the lip-service and man-invented commandments and teachings of the people” (Parry, 40). In referring to the catastrophe of worldly ideology by Judah concerning the Assyrian invasion, Isaiah “states a principle which the Apostle seizes and applies” (Archibald Robertson and Plummer, 19) to the present case.

Again, the word *apollumi* occurs for the second time (cp. v. 17). God has always obliterated or reduced man’s wisdom, in contrast to His own, to zero.

The word “wisdom” (*sophian*) refers to both “Gentile and Jewish wisdom, united in rejection of the Gospel” (Findlay, 767). “Men have always felt that their own way must be the right one (cf. Pr. 14:12, 16:25)” (Morris, 43-44).

The word translated “invalidate” (*athetesō*) denotes “set aside’ or ‘set at nought” (Robertson and Plummer, 19).

The word translated “insight” (*sunesin*) means “understanding, power of comprehension, intelligence.” This word also occurs in Mk. 12:33; Lk. 2:47; Eph. 3:4; Col. 1:9, 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:7.

The “intelligent” (*suneton*) ones are those who are “prudent,” that is, who plan carefully ahead of time, who follow sensible or discreet planning. They are known for their “special application of wisdom; its critical adjustment to particular cases” (Vincent, 192) apart from consideration of the will and word of God. All will be set aside and nullified. Thus, God promises to render null and void all “human philosophizing which is still scoffing at the Cross of Christ, the consummation of God’s power” (Robertson, 77).

The utterly stark contrast to God’s and man’s way is summarily captured in these words of Godet (92): “Not only has God in His plan not asked counsel of human wisdom, and not only in the execution of it does He deliberately dispense with its aid, but He even deals its demands a direct contradiction.”

V. 20: “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the skillful debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

In these contemplative questions involving Greek sophists (“wise”), Jewish “scribes,” and “the skillful debater of this age” – the latter of which “loves religious discussions of man’s life in time, or delights in problems of the day” (Moffatt, 14), his final question is mud in the face “over the failure of both Greek and Jew to reach the true wisdom or revelation of God” (Ibid.).

These questions illustrate and/or verify v. 19: i.e., those who are opposed to God with all their *worldly wisdom* are “destroyed” and “invalidated.”

In this last question, the word translated “world” (*kosmou*) is different from the word translated “age” (*aionos*) in the third question. The term *aionos* is the period of *time* on earth prior to the coming of Christ during which these skillful debaters and their wisdom were active. The term *kosmou* is “the *nature* of this wisdom – that which proceeds from humanity apart from God” (Godet, 95).

V. 21: “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God chose through the foolishness of the proclaimed message to save those who have faith”

The “wisdom of God” – or as Moule (4) says, “*the wisdom which belongs to God*” – has been seen throughout history in the creation of the sun, moon, stars, flowers, oceans, rivers, etc. It has also been seen in Scripture, thus making these manifestations of God’s wisdom the intended “avenue of approach to God” (Beet, 39), or at least, an awareness of God which should create humility and acknowledgment of Another beyond the world’s capacity to connect with God.

In actuality, however, the wisdom of the world did not and does not serve as a sufficient vehicle by which one comes to know God. Why? Because the world’s wisdom is devoid of divine wisdom. Since the essence of God’s nature is love, human wisdom does not embrace what it sees in nature and scripture as such. *This comes only through the revelation of God in His Son.*

It is this very fact which is embedded in “the foolishness of the proclaimed message.” The wisdom of the world regards the message of the crucified Christ as the sufficient sacrifice for sinners as utter nonsense and foolishness. It is not the act of preaching which is “foolishness” but the message that is preached that Paul is so categorizing from the world’s perspective. The sufficiency of that sacrifice, however, is directly seen in the fact that those who have faith in its sufficiency and efficacy come to know God in salvation or deliverance from the penalty, power, and ultimately the presence of sin – which was noted in v. 18.

V. 22: “Now since Jews are asking for signs and Greeks are seeking wisdom”

Jews were always “asking for signs” as the way to prove that “signs” were demonstrative of divine authority behind and within one’s actions. These “signs” which He did perform, however, were always discarded by the Jews as non-authoritative, primarily because the signs often came into conflict with their expectations and threatened their own authority.

The word translated “Greeks” (*Hellenes*) refers to non-Jews, pagans. Gould (17) offers this insightful perspective on them: “The Gentiles seek not so much external, as internal proof; not signs which would confirm authority of the messenger without regard to his message, but that the message itself be conformed to their standard of truth and wisdom.”

As Morris (45) notes:

The Greeks were absorbed in speculative philosophy. No names were honored among them than the names of their outstanding thinkers. From the lofty heights of their culture they looked down on and despised as barbarians all who failed to appreciate their *wisdom*. That this *wisdom* often degenerated into meaningless sophistries or the kind of pursuits mentioned in Acts xvii. 21 meant little to them. They still remained proud of their intellectual acuteness and found no place for the gospel

V. 23: “we are preaching Christ having been crucified, an obstacle or stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks”

So, while the Jews and Greeks/Gentiles are pursuing their own pitiful pulsations with profound evaporations and disappointments, “we are continually preaching [another present tense verb] the crucified Christ.”

Instead of commending himself to others, “we” [either a collective editorial comment or simply of himself as one along with others] confront others with Christ, “not a sign-shower nor a philosopher” (Vincent, 193) but the Anointed One of God Who had been crucified for the sake of all the condemned ones



in the world. Without discussions or debates, we are declaring divine truths about Christ having been crucified (cp. 2:2).

The word translated “obstacle, stumbling-block” (*skandalon*) is the Greek word which is transliterated into English: *scandal*. It means a “trap or snare which here tripped the Jews who wanted a conquering Messiah with a world empire, not a condemn and crucified one (Matt. 27:42; Lk. 24:21)” (Robertson, 79).

As far as the Romans were concerned, “the cross was *infelix lignum* [ill-fated or unfortunate wood], and crucifixion, the punishment of slaves and conquered enemies. To preach what was already shame as God’s way of salvation was to add insult to folly” (Edwards, 33-34).

Also, the Greeks regarded this message as “foolishness” because it did not fall into the confines of their speculative discourses. It was not something they could comprehend or explain. It was not subject to rational argumentations. “Nothing in the apprehension of rationalists can be more absurd than that the blood of the cross can remove sin, promote virtue, and secure salvation; or that the preaching of that doctrine is to convert the world” (Hodge, 22).

V. 24: “but to those called ones themselves, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [the] power of God and [the] wisdom of God”

Attention now swings away from the cold, callous ones to “the called ones themselves” who are among both Jews and Greeks. These are the ones with faith (v. 21).

This Christ Who had been crucified was both the power and the wisdom of God. Edwards (34) reminds us that in the Council of Aquileia in September of 381 A.D., Ambrose argued from this verse that He was both because He was the eternal Son of God. The effectiveness of the preaching of a Christ Who had been crucified could not have been true unless He was, in fact, both.

Beet’s (40) perspective on this is unavoidable:

*Christ is God’s power* because through the objective and historic birth and death of Jesus, and through the inward subjective spiritual union with Him, God stretched out and stretches out His mighty arm to rescue those who obey the divine summons. *Christ is God’s wisdom* because through Him, objectively and subjectively, God reveals the eternal realities underlying the present life and world, and His own eternal purpose in which with infinite skill the best means are chosen for the best ends. Cp. 2:7; Col. 2:2.

Human beings tend to prioritize what they can see (signs) and think (wisdom). Both of these “are at the heart of human self-sufficiency. But they constitute

human pride and can never know God. Reliance upon self never leads to reliance upon God. The cross means that God is known in the death of the man on the cross. But such knowledge is given only to faith. The wisdom of God is not gained, only received” (Brown, 304). The called ones know this to be true. Hodge (23) places the capstone on the matter: “In his person and work there is the highest possible manifestation both of the divine power and of the divine wisdom. And those who are called not only see, but experience this.”

V. 25: “because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is mightier than men”

The words “the foolishness of God” and “the weakness of God” are pitched as the viewpoint of those who are cold and callous toward God. The very opposite is, of course, what Paul himself is pitching.

“The language is concise: *i.e.*, wiser than the wisdom of men, stronger than the strength of men, although they may appear to themselves both wise and strong, and wish to be the standard of wisdom and strength” (Bengel, 171).

In other words, “when God has the appearance of acting irrationally or weakly, that is the time when He triumphs most certainly over human wisdom and power” (Godet, 109).

The antithetical, contrasted or opposite nature of human and divine power and wisdom is expanded in vs. 26-31. Here, Paul sets forth the kind or type of people God calls to be His own. Since God has no need of human wisdom and power, He chooses those who, from the world’s perspective, are basically bereft of these variables. However, “these He transforms, and uses as His instruments for the effecting of His purpose. His power works miracles in the most hopeless material. Thus the wisdom of God is shown to excel the best that men can produce” (Morris, 47) when it comes to experiencing and expressing the gospel message around the world.

V. 26: “In fact, consider your calling, fellow believers, that not many wise according to human nature and apart from a relationship with God, not many mighty with earthly advantages, not many of high-profile descendants [were called]”

The verb “consider” (*blepete*) means “to look on or at; regard; discover, perceive, find.” It may be either an indicative or an imperative. That is, in relation to “the nature and method of your heavenly calling” (Farrar, 8), or “the manner in which God has proceeded in drawing this Church by the preaching of the gospel from the midst of the Corinthian population” (Godet (110), just open up your eyes and “reflect on the type of person whom God has, in fact, chosen” (Morris, 48).

The word “calling” refers to God’s divine initiative in His “summons to enter

the kingdom of Grace” (Findlay, 771). This calling is not dependent on the conceitedness of those with human wisdom and power, as the following remarks unmistakably reveal. This noun occurs one other time in this letter: 7:20. [It occurs elsewhere in the NT: Rom. 11:29; Eph. 1:18; 4:1, 4; Phil. 3:14; 2 Thes. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1; 2 Pt. 1:10].

The words “not many wise according to human nature and apart from a relationship with God” indicate the limited number of those endowed with human wisdom and apart from God’s wisdom.

The words “not many mighty with earthly advantages” indicate that “the social and cultural level of the church of Corinth” (Bruce, 36) was limited when it came to influential positions and wealth.

The words “not many of high-profile descendants” indicate that “many members of the congregation may have been slaves or freed men” (Grosheide, 51). When you consider the earliest calling of Jesus to be His followers, as St. Augustine once noted, “God caught orators by fishermen, not fishermen by orators.

MacArthur’s words (50) may be hard to swallow but they surely reflect the tenor and tone of Paul’s pronouncements:

God is not looking for Phi Beta Kappas to save and to do His work. Nor is He looking for millionaires or famous athletes or entertainers or statesmen. His salvation is open to them just as surely as to others, but only on the same basis of faith. The very things that put them ahead in the world may actually put them behind with God. It is the feeling of inadequacy that makes people aware that they have need, and often draws them to the gospel.

After all, “trouble always results when men become impressed with their own self-sufficiency” (Berquist, 18).

V. 27: “but God chose the foolish things in order that He may put to shame the strong”

What is considered foolish by the world – “the content of the preaching, a foolish act contrary to all human logic, to all human expectations of God’s power, the act of God which is unintelligible to human reason . . . the act by which God reconciled the world . . . the humiliation of Christ, in the historical reality of His life and passion” (Bertram, 846-847).

The words “to put to shame the strong” indicate that “the pride of the cultured and ruling classes of paganism was to be confounded by the powers which Christianity conferred upon its social outcasts” (Findlay, 772).

V. 28: “and God chose the insignificant things of the world and things which are considered nothing in order that He may abolish the things which are”

The opinion of the world about the basic facets of Christianity, as well as the members of the church, is that they really do not count for much in the eyes of outsiders and those with authority in the world. Indeed, “the classes to which Christianity appealed were *non-entities* for philosophers and statesmen, cyphers [i.e., a person of no importance] in their reckoning” (Ibid.).

However, “they will all be destroyed by God and *brought to nought*, that is, reduced to a condition quite contrary to what they think of themselves and are thought to be in the world” (Grosheide, 52).

The presence, power, and plan of God is “to reduce to nothing those who think they are important. Before people can come under God’s grace, they must come under his judgment and see that when compared with God, they are nothing. Regardless of all that we say and do, we never can get God obligated to us” (Howard, 25).

The words of Isaac Watts in his hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” are more than worthy of repetition:

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ, my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most –  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small:  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

V. 29: “so that no flesh may boast before God”

The word translated “so that” (*hopos*) indicates the purpose of God’s actions. The reason behind God’s putting people to shame (v. 27) was that “they might come to recognize their true position in His sight. Behind the apparent harshness, there was a purpose of love” (Goudge, 13).

The so-called mighty ones, as well as the weak, could not “boast before God” because they could not obtain their salvation by their efforts. In fact, “no flesh” could do so. The only alternative for both when it came to “contemplating the victory of the cross” (Farrar, 9) was to do just that: admit that “it is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes” (Mt. 21:42/Mk. 12:11). Indeed, “we may glory not *before* him, but *in* him” (Bengel, 173).

V. 30: “and by Him you are in Christ Jesus Who became wisdom to us from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption”

The words “by Him” (*ex autou*) indicate that this God, before Whom no one can boast, is the One Who makes “calling” to a new life possible and real. And the basis, foundation, ground and sphere whereby this occurs is exclusively “in Christ Jesus” – not those of mere human wisdom, of earthly advantages, or high-profile descendants (v. 26). Rather, “it is solely derived from your fellowship with God by your unity with Christ” (Farrar, 9).

Despite the lack of worldly criteria, “the blessings in Christ far more than compensate. In him believers receive true wisdom of the cross and all its benefits – right standing before God (‘righteousness’), moral cleansing (‘holiness’), and rescue from slavery to sin (‘redemption’)” (Blomberg, 54).

Robertson and Plummer (81) suggest that “righteousness, holiness [sanctification] and redemption” are terms which describe what “wisdom” truly is. Or in the words of Vincent (194), they “illustrate and exemplify the first – wisdom.”

Goudge elaborates (13): Christ is our “‘righteousness’ – the source of our continuous acceptance with God [*made available in Christ to those with faith*], our ‘sanctification’ – the source of our permanent consecration to God [*which we could never achieve on our efforts*], our ‘redemption’ – the source of our complete and final deliverance from all evil [*finally consummated in heaven*].” [The bracket comments in italics are my own insertions].

V. 31: “in order that just as it stands written, **‘let the one who boasts boast in [the] Lord’**”

Verse 29 excluded any realistic possibility of glorying in any achievements which either Jews or Greeks could attain. As is common with Paul, he proves his point from an abbreviated Old Testament scripture (Jer. 9:24). It is more than significant that Paul applies these words about Jehovah to Christ Himself. “No higher view could be taken of the Person of Christ” (Morris, 51).

In light of this startling truth about Him, these words strike chords of exuberation in the hearts and minds of those who are “in Christ, and of what Christ is to us” (Gould, 20).

On the basis of setting forth these contrasts between Senseless Arguments (1:10-17) which proceed from and accord with human wisdom, and Scriptural Alternative (1:18-31) which proceed from and accord with divine wisdom, Deissmann (1908, 6-7) makes an interesting observation about the social status in Corinth:

Primitive Christianity stands in but slight relationship to the upper class at the beginning. Jesus of Nazareth was a carpenter, Paul of Tarsus a tentmaker, and the testimony of St. Paul at the close of the first chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, as to the origin of his congregations in the lower class of the great towns, is one of the most important witnesses to Primitive Christianity.

In his 1910 publication, he again notes that Christianity was primarily of the “lower class” (142). His observation squares with the tenor and thrust of these verses about the antithetical nature of God’s ways and man’s ways.

C. Spiritual Affirmations (2:1-16)

<u>Message of Christ</u> -----	<u>Messenger of Christ</u>
1. foolish/ness (1:18, 21, 23, 25, 27)	1. Christ crucified (2:1-2)
2. weak (1:25, 27)	2. weak (2:3)
3. power & wisdom (1:18, 21, 24, 30)	3. Spirit & power in ministry (2:4)
4. mystery (2:7; 4:1)	4. mystery (2:5; 4:1; cp. 13:2; 14:2)

Beet (58) suggests that the principles of 1:17-31 are applied in 2:1-5.

V. 1: “And when I came to you, fellow believers, I did not come with high-sounding words of speech or of wisdom while I was proclaiming the mystery of God”

As his readers will remember, when Paul came to them, he did not seek to emulate or imitate those who were parading around in eloquent speeches or displays of human wisdom which would dazzle his fellow believers. Fee (90) notes that he was “totally stripped of self-reliance, so that God’s power could be manifested and so that [their] faith might rest on him alone.”

The word “mystery” (*musterion*) was used “as a technical term in pagan religion to denote a ‘secret’ or ‘secret doctrine’ known only to the initiated, which they are not at liberty to disclose” (Moulton & Milligan, 420). However, in the Bible, “it is a secret which God wills to make known and has charged His Apostles to declare to those who have ears to hear it” (J. A. Robinson quote, *Ibid.*).

So, in a sense, Paul is taking their own terms and turning them into the very vehicles to verify the validity of the “witness that God has borne concerning His Son. And the witness is this, that God has given eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (1 John 5:10-11).

V. 2: “For I decided not to know anything [when I was] among you except Jesus Christ and this One having been crucified”

The words “not to know anything” does not mean that he did not possess other

knowledge on other subjects – a fact which is demonstrated elsewhere in this letter about other topics. But all are related to this central message which was “his singular focus and passion” (Fee, 92).

Paul’s decision about the content of his message at Corinth was that it would be one of “unadorned simplicity” (Farrar, 59). He would not depend on any skillful or theatrical maneuvering of human knowledge to gain their attention or to put them in a mesmerized state about his own polished oracle presentations. His determination was clear: the *self*-sacrifice of Jesus Christ was the only sufficient sacrifice upon which and about which he placed his faith and which he would singularly declare to them. He soon unapologetically affirms this radically redemptive truth in concrete terms: “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (3:11).

The phrase “except Jesus Christ and this One having been crucified” was always the center of his message about the gospel. Even though he was ridiculed on more than one occasion because of it, he “kept to the main track on coming to Corinth” (Robertson, 82).

V. 3: “And I myself came to you in weakness and in fear and in enormous trembling”

V. 1 tells how Paul did not come to Corinth, and this verse tells the manner in which he did come.

The word translated “weakness” (*astheneia*) is translated into English as *asthenia* – “lack or loss of strength; weakness; debility.” Parry (49) notes this term refers to the “feebleness of presence, as 1:27; cf. 2 Cor. 10:10) and the fear and trembling of a genuine humility in the face of the importance and difficulty of the task.” This is a position which all human instruments of God should adopt wherever they may be and whatever the form or type of their ministry.

Because Paul was the human instrument through which God’s power was operative (1:18; 2:4-5), he “not only eschewed all affectation of cleverness or grandiloquence, but went to the opposite extreme of diffidence and nervous self-effacement” (Archibald Robertson and Plummer, 31).

V. 4: “And my words and my proclaimed message [were] not in skillful speeches of [worldly] wisdom but in demonstrative proof of [the] Spirit [of God] and [His] power”

As if to make more clearly what he is saying, he says it again in somewhat altered phrases.

The word translated “skillful” (*peithois*) occurs nowhere else in the NT. It is also translated “enticing” (KJV); “persuasive” (NAS); “pleasing” (Williams); “clever” (Beck); “subtle arguments” (NEB). Moule (78) calls these “*words of flattery*.”

Paul is not saying that he does not seek to be *persuasive* when he preaches – which all should do and be in presenting the gospel message – but that he does not engage in pseudo-persuasive tactics; he does not follow the culture of Corinth which “put a premium on the veneer of false rhetoric and thin thinking” (Robertson, 83).

The word translated “demonstrative proof” (*apodeixei*) occurs here only in the NT. It means “to show forth” in getting some point across to others. Here, the directive is to that “*demonstration* (of the Truth) springing from *the Spirit and power of God*” (Alford, 484).

V. 5: “in order that your faith may not be in [the] wisdom of men but in [the] ability of God.”

The word translated “in order that” (*hina*) indicates the purpose of the aforementioned demonstration.

The noun “faith” (*pistis*) occurs here for the first time in this letter. It will occur again in 12:9; 13:2, 13; 15:14, 17; 16:13. The verb form of this word is commonly translated “believe” (*pisteuo*) and occurs in 1:21; 3:5; 9:17; 11:18; 13:7; 14:22 (twice); 15:2, 11. [The noun form appears in 2 Cor. in 1:24 (twice); 4:13; 5:7; 8:7; 10:15; 13:5. The verb form appears only in 2 Cor. 4:13 (twice).]

According to Bultmann, it embodies the ideas of “trusting and worthy of trust” (175); “confidence, conviction, certainty; the reliability of persons” (177); “to say Amen to God” (187); “to acknowledge as God” (198); “is essentially related to the history of the people [of God] whose existence is grounded in God’s acts and whose obedience God demands” (198); “to believe God’s words” and “to obey” (205); “the acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord” (211); “the act in virtue of which a man, responding to God’s eschatological deed in Christ, comes out of the world and makes a radical reorientation to God” (216); “constantly engaged in the struggle for perfection” (221); “the constitution of Christian life” (222); “renunciation of the World, this turning of man from himself . . . man’s self-surrender, his turning to the invisible and sovereign” (223); “it is the act of desecularisation which has to be constantly performed afresh, so that the whole of life is dominated by it; an abiding in His Word, belonging to Him, abiding in Him, is dependent on the abiding of His words in them” (226); “the reception of divine love, and from the reception of this love there springs forth love in believers” (228).

The goal of all gospel proclamation is, and always must be, the stirring up of this descriptive “faith” in God – not man’s instrumental speaking skills or impressive displays of knowledge and wisdom. The components of faith, which Bultmann delineates, can only be fulfilled and carried out in the lives of people who recognize their inability to so reproduce. At the same time, however, they rejoice in God’s ability or power to so produce and have ongoing faith in Him to do so.

As Paul expressly declares in 2 Cor. 4:6-7: “For we do not preach ourselves



but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, Who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One Who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves." The treasure is Him, not them – whoever they may be.

V. 6: "But among the mature ones we are able to speak wisdom, but not this worldly kind of wisdom [about which] the rulers of this worldly order who are passing away [like to braggingly speak]"

The word "but" (*de*) is here used in an adversative role. Paul is not attacking or belittling wisdom per se. He is, however, differentiating between two different types of wisdom and which one should be prioritized on the part of his fellow believers.

Indeed, Paul does have "more advanced teaching to impart to those who are spiritually **mature**, but evidently he does not regard the Corinthians as sufficiently mature to assimilate this wisdom (3:1-3)" (Bruce, 38). In terms of human wisdom, it typically is regarded as the application of the knowledge one possesses. Well, the Corinthians were loaded with knowledge but not the kind which leads to the application of the wisdom of God.

In fact, in 13:2, Paul says that even if he – and by implication them as well – knew all mysteries and had all knowledge but did not have love, he – and they – would be nothing. It seems readily apparent that the Corinthians were lacking in love, despite the outbursts of claims to possessing knowledge which they regarded as sufficient within itself. So, the kind or type of knowledge and wisdom are extremely important for the Christian course of conduct.

The rulers, leaders, authorities of this time-oriented age and their wisdom are actually in the process of passing away or being done away with forever; i.e., beyond the tinklings of time. This worldly kind of wisdom, and those who impress it upon others, are engaged in a form of 'glory' which is transient or temporal and fading away. It is short-lived at best.

But the wisdom of God implies otherwise, as the next verse clearly states.

V. 7: "But we speak [the] wisdom of God in a mystery which was formerly concealed [but now revealed], which God predetermined before the ages of time began for our glory"

The word "but" (*alla*) in this verse carries a stronger adversative connotation than *de* in v. 6.

This is the first occurrence of the word "mystery" (*mysterion*) in this letter (cp. 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51). Bornkamm (802-817) treats the use of this word in the Greek World and Hellenism [The Cultic Concept of Mysteries, The Mysteries in Philosophy, The Mysteries in Magic, The Mysteries in Secular

Usage, The Mysteries in Gnosticism], and in the LXX, Apocalyptic and Rabbinic Judaism], before he addresses how the term is used in the NT [The Mystery of the Divine Lordship, The Mystery of Christ, and in the Early Church] (817-828).

Paul uses this term in connection with the *kerygma* or message about Christ and the cross. He never diverts attention away from this central truth. He uses this term in a way that reveals and promotes the fact that “he is resisting the ecstatic demand of the Corinthian mystery *gnosis* for a *sophia* which will go beyond the message of the cross, and pointing to the wisdom of God which in this message is concealed from the world, and its rulers, but revealed to those endowed with the Spirit of God” (819). The word in this verse is used in connection with 1:24 where Christ is called both the power and wisdom of God.

The word translated “predetermined” (*proorisen*) occurs five other times in the NT: Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29, 30; Eph. 1:5, 11. It means “to decide from the beginning or beforehand; set apart from the beginning or beforehand; predestine.”

The revealing of this previously mysterious wisdom of God, which existed in the mind of God before the ages ruled by time began, “proves it to be superior to the ‘wisdom of this age’” (Beet, 52). What God did in and through Jesus Christ “stood firm even before time began . . . it was not something accidental” (Grosheide, 64). As Robertson and Plummer note (38), “it was no afterthought or change of plan.”

The superiority of God’s wisdom could, therefore, not be seriously questioned by anyone with a truth-seeking mindset. But that was just the case with these opponents of God’s kind of wisdom. They defined truth in a way which fulfilled their cancerous concepts.

The phrase “for our glory” may have a twofold understanding. First, the word “glory” refers to the present “forth-shining of character. The glory of the Church is the manifestation of the Divine Life of Christ Who dwells in her (Col. 1:27; 3:4)” (Goudge, 17). It is the manifestation of God’s presence in the life and time of His people. Second, the word also has a future component. It speaks “with a view to our final sharing in the state of glory in which the Lord now is” (Parry, 53).

V. 8: “[wisdom] which none of the rulers of this time-related age possesses; for if they had possessed it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”

“The rulers of this time-related age” pursued and practiced their own kind of wisdom but did not have the wisdom of God. In fact, they “treated the Divine wisdom of the gospel with sovereign contempt” (Farrar, 59). These “rulers” were either the earthly rulers (Pilate, Caiaphas, etc.) who carried out the crucifixion or the supernatural demonic forces of evil whose opposition to God and His will made them what they are, and continues so to this day.

For them – whichever option is adopted as accurate – they failed to see that by their actions they were actually carrying out the will of God: something they would not have done had they known it. For instead of cooperating with God, it has always been their own pathways of self-promotion and selfish ambitions which determine their various courses of action.

Even so, the Corinthians were pursuing their own wisdom which belongs to this age and not the wisdom which comes from God and is seen in the sacrifice of His Son for sins.

The pursuits by “the rulers of this age” and the “Corinthians” lead to the same reprehensible consequences: both are in the process of “passing away” (v. 6).

V. 9: “But just as it stands written, **What eye has not seen and ear has not heard** and did not occur to [the] heart of man, [these are the] things God prepared for those who love Him”

The words “as it stands written” are commonly used to prepare for OT quotations. While this is not an exact and direct quote of a specific passage, it is the essence of Is. 64:4 – a Pauline paraphrase?

This inability of non-spiritual people to “see” and “hear” and “understand” what God’s wisdom arranged, announced, and achieved in the sacrifice of His Son for sins is supported by this quotation. The rulers of this age and their worldly wisdom could never calculate or comprehend what and how God’s wisdom operated in His plan for man’s salvation.

Indeed, “the twin points of vv. 6-8 have previously been announced by God and are now seen as having come to pass” (Fee, 109). In fact, the things which God prepared for those who love Him are “seen” and “heard” and “understood.”

In order to play down any emphasis on “knowledge” as the way to experience these treasures, as the Corinthians had been dubbed into thinking, Paul is careful to stress that the treasures are for those who “love” God. After all is said and done, “not *gnosis* [“knowledge”] but love is the touchstone of Christian maturity and spiritually” (Barrett, 73). The significance of love is further expanded in ch. 13.

V. 10: “For God revealed them to us by means of His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God”

To punctuate his point, Paul now reenforces the fact that these treasures were not “seen, heard, and understood” by any innate ability of any human being. “For God revealed them to us by means of His Spirit.”

As Paul has already stated in v. 4, it is the Spirit Who conveys and convinces people of the truth of the message of God’s testimony in Jesus Christ. He will also stress in v. 12 that it is the Spirit of God Who gives us “insight into the blessings God has graciously given us” (Williams); “that we may know the things freely given to us by God” (NAS); “so that we can actually understand

something of God's generosity toward us" (Phillips),  
The fact that "the Spirit searches all things" indicates that "He is in all the secrets of God. He is indeed the Divine intelligence, knowing both Himself and all things" (Parry, 55).

The expression, "the deep things of God," means "the underlying Purposes and Nature of God" (Ibid); "the depths of the divine wisdom in providing for the training and redemption of mankind" (Beet, 54); that "the Spirit possesses a perfect knowledge of all the counsels of God" (Goudge, 18). Indeed, "the Spirit is the organ of mutual understanding between man and God" (Findlay, 781). "Paul's point is simply that the Holy Spirit fully comprehends the depth of God's nature and his plans of grace and so is fully competent to make the revelation here claimed" (A.T. Robertson, 86).

V. 11: "For who among men knows the things of a man except the spirit of a man who is in him? Even so the things of God no one knows except the Spirit of God."

In a manner somewhat similar to the fact that only the spirit of the individual him/herself knows the precise or exact content of his/her consciousness, so, it is only the Spirit of God Who knows the particular content of the things of God. Is there really any human being who has perfect knowledge of another? Not one. "Even so, God is One, known to himself alone. The Godhead cannot be separated from the Spirit of God, as manhood cannot be separated from the spirit of man. [Thus] the spirit of man is compared with God's Spirit *only* as being the principle of *the knowledge of each*. To carry it further leads to error" (Bengel, 176).

Other people may guess or make assumptions about what is going on inside another person. But the spirit of a person does not guess. Even so, the Spirit of God does not guess, speculate or make assumptions about what is going on inside God. He knows because He Himself is God. So, "the revelation of which Paul has been speaking is authentic. Because the Spirit who reveals is truly God, what He reveals is the truth of God" (Morris, 58).

V. 12: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit of God, in order that we may know the things graciously given by God to us"

To not receive the Spirit of the world means that mere "human reason was not the source of the knowledge which [Paul] communicated" (Hodge, 40). But what human wisdom could not discover, God disclosed in the gospel. Thus, Christians have received the Spirit only because it is the will of God to so impart to His people. It is "the imparting of Him whose Spirit it is" (Alford, 487).

The word translated "in order that" (*hina*) denotes the purpose for which God has imparted His Spirit. That is, that we may "see, hear, and understand"

(v. 9) what God has graciously communicated to His people. “The subject is the wisdom of God, the gospel, as distinguished from the wisdom of the world” (Hodge, 40). As Gould (26) puts it, “The things known correspond to the Spirit received. If that had been the spirit of the world, those receiving it would have known earthly things. God’s Spirit is given them that they may know the things of God.”

V. 13: “things we also speak not in words taught by human wisdom, but in teachings of the Spirit, combining spiritual [words] and spiritual [truths]”

Here Paul reaffirms that his manner of speaking and preaching the gospel was not in sensational words of superficial wisdom but in persuasive words of God’s wisdom.

Indeed, Paul is presenting and “representing himself as using words taught by the Spirit to express truths revealed by the Spirit, and this he vindicates as putting together things that belong together, spiritual words and spiritual truths, instead of combining things mutually distinctive” (Gould, 27).

Bengel (177) says it is interpreting “spiritual things and spiritual words to spiritual men.” Farrar (61) says it is best rendered, “explaining spirituals to spiritual men.” According to Grosheide (72), the word “*spiritual* indicates the character of the contents.” Even though the Christians in Corinth are far from perfect, they are, nevertheless, “spiritual” (*pneumatous*) by virtue of their union in Jesus Christ. By reminding them of this truth, Paul is likely hoping to jar them into a state of realization that will lead them to be willing and responsive to his purpose in writing.

V. 14: “Now a non-spiritual man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolish to him and he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned”

In contrast to them as “spiritual” people, those who are “non-spiritual” are incapable of receiving the things taught by the Spirit of God. That is, they do not acknowledge, recognize, or understand the things of the Spirit because they are “destitute of the Spirit’s working” (Grosheide, 73).

Paul here introduces the word *psuchikos* – “he who only has *psuche* and no *pneuma* which is born again by the Holy Spirit” (Grosheide, 73) – “a person who has nothing more than an ordinary human soul” (BAG, 685).

This word occurs three other times in this letter (15:44 [twice], 46), and once in James 3:15 and Jude 19.

Paul’s focus in this verse is on the negative side, perhaps expanding his earlier ideas in verses 6, 8-9. It is a contrast between one who is “governed by the divine Spirit and one from whom the Spirit is absent” (Vincent, 198). The latter do not “receive” or comprehend and adopt such things.

The word translated “foolish” (*moria*) indicates they regard the Spirit teachings about the cross and other parts of the gospel message as folly, mindless, absurd, ignorant, and trivial talk.

The non-spiritual person cannot do otherwise. After all, the things of the Spirit are examined or investigated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit Who alone “leads to the right knowledge of divine things” (Gould, 27).

The word “discerned” (*anakrinetai*) occurs here for the first time in this letter: cp. v. 15 (twice); 4:3 (twice); 4; 9:3; 10::25, 27; 14:24. It means to “question, examine; judge, evaluate.”

As Bruce (40-41) phrases it, “everything that belongs to our heritage from the first Adam, the father of our mortal humanity, is therefore *pschikon*; everything which we derive from union with the exalted Christ, the head of the new creation, is *pneumatikon*, the more so as it is conveyed to us by the Spirit.” He expands this latter facet in the next verse.

V. 15: “But the one who is spiritual discerns all things, yet he himself is not properly evaluated or examined by anyone [who is not spiritual]”

The word “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) refers to one who “possesses the divine *pneuma* [“Spirit” Who] enables him to penetrate the divine mysteries” (BAG, 685).

From the ultimate standpoint, “the man of God is answerable to God alone, and in any case he cannot be assessed at all by those who have not the same Spirit as he has received” (Bruce, 41).

The spiritual person belongs to God and the things of the Spirit of God. The non-spiritual person cannot comprehend this. “And so the same things which makes other matters comprehensible to him, makes him incomprehensible to others. The spiritual man remains a riddle to the natural man” (Gould, 28).

V. 16: “For **who has known [the] mind of the Lord, that he can instruct or inform Him?** But we have [the] mind of Christ.”

This quotation is from Isa. 40:13

The word “mind” (*noun*) refers to “God’s infinite wisdom, directing man’s salvation through inscrutable ways (6-9); but the Apostle’s contention is that this ‘mind’ inspires the organs of revelation (10 ff.), and *its* superiority to the judgment of the world is relatively also *theirs* (14 ff.)” (Findlay, 785).

The question ‘who can instruct or inform Him?’ refers to one who is qualified to give God advice. It is an absurd or ridiculous question because no one is so qualified. Indeed, the very “thought of giving *instruction* to God reveals how infinitely far is the wisest man from comprehending the mind of God” (Beet, 57). In the OT, this was referring to Jehovah.

To say that “we have [the] mind of the Lord” means that we have the mind of Jehovah. “What is true of one is true of the other. The same person who is

revealed in the New Testament as the Son of God, was revealed of old as Jehovah” (Hodge, 46). It would, therefore, be totally illogical, unreasonable, and irrational for anyone who is taught by the Spirit “to give up his convictions to the authority of men” (Ibid.), as the Corinthians either have done or are tempted to do. To have the “mind of Christ” is “based upon the claim to be united by a living bond with Christ, cf. Gal. 2:20); as Christ lives in them, His heart beats in them (Phil. 1:8), He speaks in them (2 Cor. 8:2; Phil. 2:5), so He thinks in them, they think His thoughts” (Parry, 60).

D. Servanthood Acknowledged (3:1-23)

Beet (58) suggests that the principles in 2:6-16 are applied in 3:1-4.

V. 1: “And I, fellow believers, have not been able to speak to you as spiritual ones but as fleshly ones, as babes in Christ.”

Even though Paul uses the affectionate term “fellow believers” (*adelphoi*), his following words are sadly somewhat confrontational.

To say that he had “not been able to speak” to them in a different manner when he was with them in Corinth is based on their spiritual condition.

The word “spiritual ones” (*pneumatikois*) indicates “belonging to the Divine Spirit, *emanating from the Divine Spirit*, or *exhibiting [His] effects and so [His] character; one who is filled with and governed by the Spirit of God*” (Thayer, 523).

The word “fleshly ones” (*sarkinois*) “implies earthliness and weakness and the absence of spirituality” (Farrar, 92); it depicts “the incapacity of the un-spiritual for spiritual things” (Findlay, 785). Thayer (569) says it means “*wholly given up to the flesh, rooted in the flesh.*” BAG (750) notes, “*belonging to the realm of the flesh*, in so far as it is weak, sinful, and transitory.” They are “babes” (*nepiois*) but still are “in Christ.” Nevertheless, their immaturity stifles or suffocates any efforts to speak to them in a more advanced manner.

Even though the new birth brings about the principle of righteousness by which the Christian life is to be dominated, it does not exterminate the old sinful nature. The new nature does not replace the old nature but the new nature does make possible continuing growth in the Christian enterprise.

The Christians at Corinth were still in nursery or elementary school and they had not been promoted to “the advanced stage of Christian growth” (Gould, 29).

They were recipients of the new divine nature but were conducting themselves in a manner which prioritized the old unspiritual nature.

Robertson’s (92) words are alarming: “It is one of the tragedies of the minister’s life that he has to keep on speaking to the church members ‘as unto babes in Christ’, who actually glory in their long babyhood whereas they ought to be teachers of the gospel instead of belonging to the cradle roll.”

V. 2: “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you have not yet been able [for it]; but even now you are not yet able”

In light of their “cradle roll” status, Paul had to give them “milk to drink.” Milk, of course, is proper for newborns, but its value is not sufficient for growth beyond the early years. Here it refers to “the first missionary instruction which declared the facts of the revelation of salvation; solid food [*broma*] was the word of wisdom which disclosed its meaning” (Behm, 643), that is, above and beyond the initial facts of salvation.

The provision of this spiritual nourishment is mandatory because it “clears away all impurities” (Moulton and Milligan, 118).

Their lack of readiness for this spiritual nourishment is embarrassing, at the very least. Their lack of progress was inexcusable. “It was all very well for the Corinthians to have been in the position of *babes* when they actually were *babes*. But they should have outgrown that stage long ago” (Morris, 63).

Robertson (92-93) delivers additional sad notes in this regard: “It is pathetic to think how the preacher has to clip the wings of thought and imagination because the hearers cannot go with him. But nothing hinders great preaching like the dulness caused by sin on the part of auditors who are impatient with the high demands of the gospel.”

V. 3: “For you are still fleshly ones. For where there is jealousy and strife, are you not still unspiritual and living in accordance with merely human standards?”

Here, Paul replaces *sarkinos* (v.1) with *sarkikos* (twice in this verse) to denote those who are “governed by mere human nature, not by the Spirit of God” (Thayer, 569). BAG (750) calls them, “immature Christians.” Vincent (200) agrees: “though they have received the Spirit in some measure, they are yet under the influence of the flesh.”

Their immature status is revealed in their “jealousy and strife.” The word “jealousy” (*zelos*) occurs here only in this letter – but several times in 2 Cor.: 7:7, 11; 9:2; 11:2; 12:20. It means to “*be filled w. jealousy, envy toward someone*” (BAG, 338). It embodies “*an envious and contentious rivalry* now the stirring of emotions, now its outbursts and manifestations” (Thayer, 271).

The term “strife” (*eris*) first appeared in 1:11; it occurs in 2 Cor. only once: 12:20. It refers to “*discord, contention, quarrels*” (BAG, 309). Thayer (249) adds, “*wrangling*.”

Taken together, these two terms indicate their “low religious state [which prompted them] to act wickedly” (Hodge, 50). This is a follow-up on the “sample of the sectarian spirit” (Alford, 490) he mentioned in 1:12.

What arguments could they advance to rebut Paul’s appraisal of the matter? The best evidence was before them. It totally justified Paul’s confrontation



that they were “still unspiritual and living in accordance with merely human standards.” They were attributing to mere man what belonged to God. They were acting like people who did not have the Spirit of God within them, even though they actually did. What a crucial contradiction their conduct conveyed! V. 4: “For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not acting like mere human beings?”

Paul resurrects their very words (1:12) in an effort to convince and convict them of their carnal condition. This rhetorical – or at least semi-rhetorical – question is “a device which contains less sharpness than a positive statement and which suits the cautious type of argument used here and throughout the epistle” (Grosheide, 81). He is trying to stir up their mental and spiritual faculties so as to bring about change or repentance. His aim was correction, not condemnation.

V. 5: “What is Apollos? And what is Paul? [Just] servants through whom you exercised faith, just as the Lord gave to each one.”

Two more rhetorical – or semi-rhetorical – questions posed by Paul to clarify that there was not anything within or about him and Apollos or their respective work in Corinth which was designed to “make them objects of devotion and leaders of sects or parties” (Parry, 63). They were simply the servants whom God called and used to create faith within the Corinthians. Each did his own separate ministries in concert with the Lord’s leadership.

V. 6: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was the One giving the increase.”

He strengthens the submitted position of each with the words “planted” and “watered.” Paul, as they knew, founded the church by being the one who initially planted the seed of God’s gospel before them. Apollos came later and “watered” that seed. Nevertheless, it was God and not them who was responsible for the subject growth of that seed. Neither Paul nor Apollos made it grow.

The imperfect tense of the verb “giving the increase” denotes that the blessings of God were on both Paul and Apollos who were co-laborers with God but no growth was possible without God being responsible for the beneficial fruits or results. With no regard for compliments or commendations about either himself or Apollos, he strongly attributes all credit to God.

V. 7: “So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God Who keeps things growing.”

He continues to punctuate and hammer home the fact that without God’s keeping things going and growing, what he and Apollos did would not be worth

anything. In the words of a popular song, “Without Him I [we] could do nothing, Without Him I’d [we’d] surely fail, Without Him I [we] would be drifting like a ship without a sail.”

V. 8: “Now the one who plants and the one who waters are one, but each will receive his own reward in accordance with his own labor.”

In fact, rather than being in competition with one another, Paul here claims that they are “one” in focus and intention. They were working together because they both were called and commissioned for their respective ministry roles in Corinth. They both belonged to God and the Corinthians should wake up and realize that they too are fellow believers who also are working together with God. There is no need for favorites or room for fussing over human instruments in the hands of God.

Just as Paul and Apollos would receive from God their own “reward” in concert with their particular parts in the ministry at Corinth, it is God’s decision to make as to what, when, and how that “reward” will occur.

For those readers with ears to hear, the same will be true for each of them.

V. 9: “For we are God’s fellow-workers, you are God’s field, God’s building.”

Paul’s conscientiousness causes him to reaffirm the mutual purpose of partnership between him and Apollos together with God.

The Corinthians are designated as “God’s field” (*theou georgion*), that is, God is the One Who carefully manages their affairs and “the growth of the Church” (Findlay, 789).

They are also designated as “God’s building” (*theou oikodome*), that is, God is the One Who structures “the mutual adaptation of its parts” (Ibid.) to provide functioning and growth for His Church. Indeed, God gives “gifts” – parts which Paul will elaborate in ch. 14 – and by these various parts or “gifts,” the Church functions and grows [see my website for the paper: *The Biblical Recipe for Church Functioning and Growth* – [archive.org/details/@mandm313](http://archive.org/details/@mandm313).]

It is God Himself Who has all rights in His Church. All members of the body of Christ belong to Him – and to one another. All are equal and should benefit from each other’s gift/s, which God dispenses as He sees fit. Divisions, quarrelings, sects, and favorites all run counter to God’s design for His Church.

V. 10: “According to the grace of God which has been disclosed to me, as an expert builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it”

This “grace” refers to his task as an apostle to found new churches – which he formerly had been persecuting and trying to extinguish. This understanding of the word ties in with the emphasis in verses 5-9 upon God Who is the primary grower of churches. What made him “wise” as “an expert builder” or “master

builder” is the fact that he built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ – not strife and divisions, as per the Corinthians. Paul was *wise* “only in the sense of subordinating every pretense of human wisdom to the will of God” (Farrar, 94). As Fee (139) clarifies, “the whole point of the analogy is to warn them of the consequences of persisting on their present course.”

Romans 15:20 states that Paul preferred working in virgin territory and not building on the foundation laid by another. The word “another” (*allos*) likely refers to Apollos.

V. 11: “For no one is able to lay another foundation than the one laid, which is Jesus Christ”

When it comes to founding churches, there is no other foundation upon which to build than Jesus Christ. There may be other foundations for other groups within a community, but not for the Church. Christ is the core of Christianity [cp. my commentary on Colossians on my website:

[archive.org/details/@mandm313](http://archive.org/details/@mandm313).] It is always Paul’s point to stress the centrality of Christ in Christianity.

V. 12: “Now if someone builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, honorable stones, wood, hay, straw”

The six building materials consist of three superior and three inferior materials. In keeping with the emphasis scattered throughout this section of scripture, the “gold, silver, honorable stones” typify the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and “wood, lay, straw” typify human wisdom “in all its human forms” (Fee, 140).

Brown (310-311), on the other hand, thinks the gold, silver, honorable stones refer to mature persons, like Apollos. Those who are not so mature, will use wood, hay, straw.

V. 13: “the work of each one shall be made clear, for the day shall make it clear, because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove the quality of each person’s work”

The quality of each builder and his works will ultimately be made clear. The day of judgment will answer all questions. The quality of work performed by “each one” will be evaluated by God. All will be subjected to “the fire of Christ’s presence Who is the refiner, not the avenger” (Farrar, 94). He will expose what is of value and what is worthless (Morris, 67-68), as the next two verses specify.

V. 14: “if the work of anyone which he built shall remain, he shall receive a reward”

The work which shall remain or survive after the fiery test is that of gold, silver, honorable stones. This refers to all types of Christian ministries (worship, witness, work, preaching, teaching and other of the 21 spiritual gifts) which were properly motivated and carried out without improper motives and methods. The “reward” will be commensurate with the quality of work conducted in and upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

V. 15: “if the work of anyone shall be burned up, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, but as through a fire”

The work will shall be burned up is that of wood, hay, straw. This refers to all types of Christian ministries noted in v. 14 which were not properly motivated and carried out with proper motives and methods. The “loss” will be seen in the lack of dispensed “reward.”

As Grosheide (87) clarifies, these believers

build on the good foundation without having the intention of destroying the work of God, and although they are guilty by reason of the lack of permanency of their work, their state before God may be secure. Here again Paul assumes that there are teachers at Corinth who lead the church in the wrong direction. His words contain a consolation for those who feared they might perish because they had not built in the right way.

The phrase, “but he himself shall be saved, as through a fire” are “like a man pulled to safety through the smoke and flames of his burning house, for his salvation depends on God’s grace, not on his own works; but he would have nothing to show for all his labour” (Bruce, 44).

V. 16: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and the Spirit of God lives in you?”

Verses 16-17 may be regarded as a beginning point where Paul lays the foundation of the relationship between the Christian faith and ethical matters. The church is a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit and through the church the Spirit seeks to deliver to the world of corruption and immorality “moral purity and strong, well-established sentiments of [Christ-like] character” (Short, 60).

In 5:1-14:40, Paul will expand this into a superstructure of how this Christ-like character and purity are to be manifested in six areas: **1.** sexual immorality (5:1-13) – **2.** suing (6:1-11) – **3.** sanctity of the body (6:12-20) – **4.** sacred marriage (7:1-40) – **5.** sacrificial meats (8:1-11:1) – **6.** significant worship (11:2-12:40).

More specific facets and features of these ethical matters will be seen in the noted sections of scripture where detailed exposition unfolds.

The word “you are” (*este*) is a second person plural which denotes the church at large, not an individual.

The words “temple of God” extends the ‘building’ syndrome mentioned earlier. The word “temple” calls to remembrance the shrine or sanctuary where the very presence of God was experienced. The idea is that God inhabits His Church as the meeting-place between Him and His family. The Church consists of those who have faith in Him and obey Him. The Spirit of God lives in and through His Church.

The question raised questions whether or not they “know” this experientially (*oida* – not *ginosko*). Their present conduct reflects severe doubts as to whether or not this reality has actually penetrated their consciousness.

V. 17: “If anyone is destroying the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”

The divisions manifested in their wrangling behaviors or conduct is now brought into a different light. These divisions are actually doing the very opposite of God’s intention for His Church. They are “destroying” it. Beware, because “to engage in divisions is to ‘destroy’ the divine society, and consequently to invite God to ‘destroy’ [*phtherei*] the sinner” (Morris, 70).

The word “destroy” means “the destruction of men as a result of God’s judgment – the death penalty that God will exact on those who destroy His temple” (Harder, 102). Morris (70) states that “the word does not indicate either annihilation or eternal torment.” Indeed, v. 15 denoted that even a bad worker is, nevertheless, saved. So, the exact nature of this destruction is no slight matter, even if it simply denotes physical death. To say that God’s temple is holy and that they themselves are that temple, “reminds the Cor. at once of the obligations their sanctity imposes, and of the protection it guarantees” (Findlay, 793).

There are no amounts of immoralities or party schisms which the false teachings within the church had advocated which justify or excuse them. God will protect His temple, and from those protective means which God uses, whatever they may precisely be, no one will escape the consequences of His actions.

V. 18: “No one must deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise”

Paul now returns to the contrasts between human and divine wisdom. Self-deception occurs when one regards himself wise in the wisdom of the world or whether he is wise in his adherence to some teacher who advo-

cates wisdom from worldly standards.

In either case, it would be wiser for him to become a fool in the eyes of the world which detracts attention away from God in Christ and embrace the wisdom of God by commitment to Christ and the sufficiency of His sacrifice which is central to God's gospel.

Aa Brown (28) sums up,

the wisdom of this world is absolute foolishness in comparison with the wisdom of God. History gives ample proof of this contention. In all the ages the most brilliant intellectualism, the most sage philosophy, the most advanced scientific knowledge has never satisfied the deep need of the human soul for salvation from sin.

V. 19: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God; for it stands written, **[God is] The One Who catches the wise in their craftiness;**"

As Lenski (152) points out,

In this statement of Paul's there is, of course, no repudiation of the genuine results of science in any department as far as these pertain to our earthly life, but there is a complete repudiation of any and of all hypotheses, theories, and speculations, scientific, philosophic, or popular, which lord it over Christ and the Scriptures.

This truth is embedded in Paul's OT quotation from Job 5:13. Paul is not downplaying, mitigating, or minimizing "the capacity of the worldly wise within their own field. But he stoutly denies that their *craftiness* is of any avail against the might and the wisdom of God" (Morris, 19).

V. 20: and again, **[The] Lord knows the reasonings of the** wise, that they are useless"

Another OT quote from Ps. 94:11 underscores this truth. Here the "reasonings of the wise" is in reference "to perverse despisers of God" (Farrar, 95). Their "reasonings" or "intellectual processes are *fruitless*; they reach no real ends in their thinking" (Gould, 35). They are "worthless, futile." So, both of these OT quotations "declare the impotency and insufficiency of human wisdom" (Hodge, 61).

V. 21: "Therefore no one must boast in men; for all things are yours"

The word "therefore" (*hoste*) draws a conclusion from the previously noted facts about worldly vs. divine wisdom, and the servanthood role which Christian leaders play in the carrying out of the will of God. To think and

act counter to these truths only results from self-deception. In fact, “the spirit of glorying in parties is a species of self-conceit and inconsistent with glorying in the Lord (1:31)” (Robertson, 100).

The word “for” sets forth the reason for not boasting in men: they possess all that is necessary for the Church and themselves to be of service to God and to one another.

“It is always a tendency of Christians to underrate the grandeur of their privileges by exaggerating their supposed monopoly of *some* of them, while *many* equally rich advantages are at their disposal” (Farrar, 95).

V. 22: “whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, whether [the] world or life or death, whether things present or things to come, all [are] yours”

“The wealth of the Christian includes all things, all leaders, past, present, future, Christ, and God. There is no room for partisan wrangling here” (Robertson, 101). Simply put, “all these things contribute to their good” (Gould, 35). In other words, “the immeasurable riches of the wisdom and grace of God in Christ” make everything in life avenues of service to God and immeasurably richer than they and life would be apart from Him.

V. 23: “and you [are] of Christ, and Christ [is] of God.”

Paul has run the gamut of realization to its conclusion. Christ is theirs by virtue of their union with Him, and Christ belongs to God by virtue of His Sonship with God. And Christ is the the Mediator Who brings both God and man together, and this fact of being brought into a relationship with God “is the crowning reason for their not acknowledging the mastership of men by boasting in them” (Gould, 36).

Parry (72) maintains that throughout this section of scripture, the main idea is that of ownership: “as their ownership of all things is based upon Christ’s ownership of them . . . [and this leads to the realization of] Christ’s belonging to God.”

Therefore, “let the church at Corinth and everywhere else lift up adoring praise to the altar of God and away from the altar of boastful human pride” (Brown, 313).

#### E. Stewardship Accentuated (4:1-7)

The words of MacArthur (95) are shocking, but shockingly true:

A popular game played by many Christians is that of evaluating pastors. All kinds of criteria are used to determine who are the most successful, the most influential, the most gifted, the most effective. Some maga-

zines periodically make surveys and write up extensive reports, carefully ranking the pastors by church membership, attendance at worship services, sizes of church staff and Sunday School, academic and honorary degrees, books and articles written, numbers of messages given at conferences and conventions, and so on. As popular as that practice may be, it is exceedingly offensive to God.

Without playing any kind of game, Paul puts God's perspective in view about the nature, make-up, and aim of how church leaders are to function and to be evaluated. This is done so within the framework and parameters of *stewardship* – “management of God's household and/or affairs.”

V. 1: “So, a man must regard us as ministers of Christ and managers of the mysteries of God”

Rather than regarding Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and any other leader as worthy of complete consecration and absolute loyalty to their very personhoods, the Christians at Corinth must alter or modify their mistaken mindset. The position and pronouncement of prioritizing any human leader above “central loyalty” (Brown, 313) to Christ runs the risk of relegating Christ to a position of minor or minimal importance. Here, therefore, Paul sets forth before his readers the proper position about Christ and human leaders which must be adopted.

The word translated “regard” (*logizestho*) is a present tense, imperative mood verb which calls for an ongoing, non-negotiable command as to how they should reckon, calculate, think, and look upon Paul, Apollos, and Cephas. This word is where the English word “logic” originates or is a spin-off. The command is to be logical, sensible, and rational in this matter of mere human assessments. In this verse, there are two key words around which and about which the proper assessment position must circulate.

First, Paul clarifies that these human leaders are “ministers” (*huperetas*) or “servants” ((NAS, Beck) who belong to Christ. This is Paul's only use of the word in the NT, though it occurs elsewhere: Mt. 5:25; 26:58; Mk. 14:54, 65; Lk. 1:2; 4:20; Jn. 7:32, 45, 46; 18:3, 12, 18, 22, 36; 19:6; Ac. 5:22, 26; 13:5; 26:16. The term denotes a “*helper, assistant, who serves a master or a superior*” (BAG, 850). Thayer (641-642) adds, “*an under rower, subordinate rower; any one who aids another in any work.*”

Paul's point is that neither he nor others are seeking to advance their own unique credentials or claims to loyalty. Their own loyalty is demonstrated in their diligence, toil, and efforts to serve their Superior - Christ.

His readers should read between the lines and follow suit.

Second, Paul employs the word “managers” (*oikonomous*) as another way for his readers to assess himself and others. It occurs again in v. 2. Paul's first use



of the word was in Rom. 16:23, and will use it again in Gal. 4:2 and Tit. 1:7. It first appeared in the NT in Lk. 12:42; 16:1,3, 8; and its last occurrence in the NT is 1 Pt. 4:10.

The term denotes “a slave who acts as an overseer and supervises other slaves and has the responsibility of overlooking the affairs of a household” (Brown, 313). Here, of course, the household is the church of family of God. Indeed, Paul and others are “the administrators of divine things” (BAG, 562). In relation to his readers, it also denotes “any and every Christian who rightly uses the gifts intrusted to him by God for the good of his brethren” (Thayer, 441). The term “mysteries” (*mysterion*) first appeared in 2:7 (cp. for comments). It refers to the revealed, rather than concealed, message from God about the good news of His deliverance from sin’s dominion (salvation) exclusively in and through His Son.

Again, Paul hereby sets aside any indications or implications of the superlative commendation of human agents in the declaration of God’s good news. Its center and superlative focus is Jesus Christ.

V. 2: “In this connection, it is required in the one seeking management that he may have been found faithful”

The prerequisite for the “manager” – singular here, though plural in v. 1 - in the discharge of duties about the good news of God’s message is that of faithfulness or dependability. This is not a peripheral or adjunct consideration. It is the heart and core virtue of one’s very being. This person is “expected to act faithfully, without interruption, and with the sacrifice of his own interests” (Grosheide, 99). Trustworthiness or reliability is not optional.

V. 3: “And to me it is insignificant that I may have been examined by you or of a human day [of judgment]; but I do not even examine myself”

The word “me” (*emoi*) is an idiomatic expression denoting something that is “directed, inclined toward someone” (BAG, 224). Here, it is an examination couched in *criticism*.

Apparently, some in the church had criticized – “examined” (*anakritho* – “called to account, questioned, judged, evaluated,”) Paul in particular. So, here he changes from the pronoun “we” to “me” and “I.” In essence, he is saying that “all that [he and] they preach, teach, order and do has its origin and basis in God’s plan for the world as this is manifested in Christ . . . making Paul and Apollos independent of the criticisms and evaluations of the Corinthian Christians and also protecting them against self-criticism on any grounds, vv. 3 ff” (Rengstorff, 542).

The words “of a human day” (*anthropines hemeras*) “is bounded by too narrow an horizon for accurate judgments” (Farrar, 132), even though set or appointed by a judge. This narrowness also includes the apparent criticism of the Corin-

thians.

Findlay (797) observes this careful transition: “This transition from Cor. judgment to self-judgment shows that no formal trial was in question; [but when] arraigned before the bar of public opinion, P. wishes to say that he rates its estimate *eis elachiston* [“insignificant, very little”] in comparison with that of his heavenly Master.”

V. 4: “For I am not aware of anything against myself, yet I am not vindicated by this, for the One Who examines me is the Lord”

When Paul says that he is “not aware of anything against himself,” he is referring to “his apostolic duties” (Calvin/Barrett, 102). He may also be referring to anything else in his life in terms of guilty secrets.

However, whatever the precise meaning may be, he is speaking from the standpoint of “human ignorance rather than human innocence [for] justification [from any and all sin or sinfulness] is an act of God, not of man, an act based not on man’s sinlessness but on God’s grace: God justifies not the good but the ungodly (Rom. 4:5)” (Barrett, 102).

Indeed, even though Paul says that he is free from any charge of condemnation against himself, he knows that he is “not competent to institute a conclusive examination” (Vincent, 205). For that type examination, the Lord Himself alone is so qualified. And He will institute and execute it accordingly.

This examination by the Lord will take place on “the day of God’s final judgment” (BAG, 347). The mention of “day” in v. 13 sets the stage for the future day of God’s final judgment. There is no “suggestion that this ‘day’ is already present or even reaches into the present. It will dawn with the revelation of the glory of Jesus at His *parousia*” (Delling, 952-953).

V. 5: “So then do not persist in passing any judgment until the Lord has come, Who shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness and shall disclose the motives of the hearts; and then each one shall receive for himself praise from God”

Their “censorious habit was ruining the Corinthian church” (Robertson, 104). The realization of these aforementioned truths created within him, and should create within them, the necessity of obeying his prohibition against persisting in “passing any judgment [on others] until the Lord has come.”

This is a present tense verb expressing a prohibition which is to begin now and continue. After all, they are not qualified and do not possess all the knowledge there is about Paul and his ministry. “Thus, their judgments are inconsequential both because only the Lord can judge his own servants (v. 4b), and also because only the final eschatological judgment counts for anything” (Fee, 163).

As seen in 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Chron. 28:9; Psa. 139:1, 11-12, only God is capable of knowing and searching human hearts. Even the very motives of

one's actions are known only to Him.

This verse reinforces v. 4. They too will receive from God "praise" which is consistent with and according to His searches. All will be disclosed and dispense accordingly.

V. 6: "Now these things, fellow believers, I have applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes in order that in us you may learn not to go beyond what is written, in order that you may stop boasting about one over against the other"

"These things" (*tauta*) refer to what he has been writing about himself and Apollos which was done by means of a *transformative* format. In other words, the word translated "applied" (*meteschematisma*) indicates a "change, transform, alter the form of." It occurs only four other times in the NT: 2 Cor. 11:13 (of false apostles), v. 14 (Satan himself), and v. 15 (Satan's ministers); and Phil. 3: 21 (of the body).

In this verse, Paul is saying, "I have given this teaching of mine the form of an exposition concerning Apollos and myself" (BAG, 515). By implication, he is saying, "if there are others to whom the lesson is suitable, then let it be applied to them too" (Bruce, 48). That is, no one in Corinth or elsewhere should "go beyond the gospel of Christ crucified and risen which they had received 'in accordance with the scriptures' (15:3f.)" (Ibid., 48-49).

The very OT scriptures themselves consistently warned about boasting over God's leaders, whomever they were. By ignoring these OT warnings, the Corinthians Christians were grasping "the sin of holding in contempt the Old Testament" (Grosheide, 104).

After all, that which laid the foundation of their quarrels and divisions was "the sin of being puffed up" or "boasting" about one favorite preacher-teacher over against another one. The word "boasting" (*phusiousthe*) occurs five other times in this letter: 4:18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4 – and only one other time in the NT: Col. 2:18. It paints "a vivid picture of pomposity and conceit" (Berquist, 33). Scripture warned of it and resistance to it was resistance without excuse. That truth is still in operation today.

V. 7: "For what makes you superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you go on boasting about yourself as if you did not receive it?"

The word "you" is in the singular and refers to each person individually. To each one who claims superiority of their favorite teacher-preacher over against another one's favorite is insensible. After all, no matter what each one may know and has received, it has come to him/her from God; the favorite teacher-preacher was simply an *instrument* – not the *source* of their knowledge and resources. "Boasting about yourself" displays incoherence and betrays reality.

F. Sarcasm Applied (4:8-13)

V. 8: “You have already been filled to complete satisfaction. You are already rich. You became kings without us. I wish you had, indeed, become kings in order that we may reign with you”

In contrast to the humility and gratitude advocated in v. 7, Paul applies statements of sarcasm to them in simple expressions. They were acting as if they had been filled with the Spirit to such an extent that all the spiritual gifts which were available were actually in their possession. They, therefore, were above others and had been “transported into a whole new sphere of existence” (Fee, 172).

Refer to their already being rich is another figure of speech by which they stressed their superiority to others.

The word “kings” portrays their boasting that the final reign of God had already begun in them. The words “without us” denote that they had arrived without any help from Paul or Apollos or Cephas. They had “surely entered the promised kingdom and secured its treasures” (Findlay, 201). So, God’s “ministers and managers” (v. 1) are not needed and have nothing more to say or impart to them.

Paul’s sarcastic response is that he wished he and Apollos and Cephas and perhaps others (“we”) could have had the same spiritual sensitivity and be reigning with them. That is, “if their self-estimate be true, they are much more fortunate than their teachers” (Beet, 81).

V. 9: “For I think God placed us apostles last as those sentenced to death because we have been made a theatrical spectacle to the world and to angles and to men”

Paul’s appraisal is that God has set forth apostles “as the last part of a gladiatorial show of men doomed to death in an arena at the hands of men or beasts before many spectators, *a spectacle*, a sight for the whole world to see, a world which is made up of both *angels* and *men*” (Brown, 316). Indeed, the word translated “sentenced to death” (*epithanatiou*) occurs here only in the NT and is “an allusion to the practice of exposing condemned criminals in the amphitheater to fight with beasts or with one another as gladiators” (Vincent, 206).

Robertson (107) notes, “all this in violent contrast to the kingly Messianic pretensions of the Corinthians.”

V. 10: “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ; we are weak but you on the other hand are strong; you are respected, and we [are] dishonored”

With biting irony and sarcasm, he continues to contrast apostles with the

Christians at Corinth: 1. **“we – fools”**: because we cast aside all human wisdom for His sake, and as a consequence are “rated as ignoramuses and know-nothings” (Lenski, 184); **“you – wise”**: because they still note their connection with Christ, and “know how to use even Christ for their advantage” (Ibid); 2. **“we – weak”**: because in addition to our physical weakness, we depend on the ability of the gospel to make us strong apart from the wisdom of this world; **“you – strong”**: because you are full of worldly wisdom which makes you impressive in the eyes of the world; 3. **“you – respected”**: because the world honors those who engage in its type of wisdom; **“we – dishonored”**: because divine wisdom is regarded with contempt and revulsion by the world. He inverts the third contrast in preparation for moving from general contrasts to more particular facts *about himself* in the following verse.

V. 11: “Now at the present time, we are hungry and thirsty and we are without sufficient clothing and we being beaten and we are homeless”

The terms “hungry, thirsty, without sufficient clothing” are self-evident in their meanings. The term “being beaten” (*kolaphizometha*) means “*slapped in the face*” (Farrar, 135); “*strike with the fist, cuff*” (BAG, 441); *to treat with violence and contumely*” (Thayer, 353); “uncalled-for, vulgar, physical abuse . . . the height of indignity” (Lenski, 186).

“Homeless” is another axiomatic expression: no fixed permanent dwelling but constant traveling from place to place.

V. 12: “we are growing weary while working with our own hands; while being spoken evil of, we are blessing; while we are being persecuted, we endure [it]”

Paul’s sufferings in Ephesus, from which he writes, “were very severe . . . how keenly he felt the indignities, which he was called to bear” (Goudge, 33). In fact, the word “working” (*kopiomen*) “always seems to involve some associated idea of toilsomeness or suffering” (Ellicott, 76). The word occurs again in 15:10; 16:16. Paul uses this word elsewhere in Rom. 16:6, 12 (twice); Gal. 4:11; Eph. 4:28; Phi. 2:16; Col. 1:29; 1 Th. 5:12; 1 Ti. 4:10; 5:17; 2 Ti. 2:6. Part of the hardship of the apostles is that they had to earn their own living while they were preaching the gospel, and “that great labour was required” (Parry, 81).

The words “while being spoken evil of” denote “being railed at or made the object of scurrility [coarse remarks, and joking]; injurious words” (Hodge, 73), and “we are blessing” means to “speak well of, or implore good upon: to return abuse with kind words, or, with good wishes and prayers” (Ibid.).

“Persecuted” means being subjected to “injurious acts” (Ibid.).

To “endure” means “we patiently submit to it without resistance or complaint” (Ibid.).

V. 13: “while we are being slandered we speak words of encouragement; we have become like the worthless filth of the world, the scum of all things until now”

The word “slandered” (*dusphemoumenoi*) means “having evil deeds or motives ascribed to us” (Hodge, 74). It occurs here only in the NT.

The word “encouragement” (*parakaloumen*) means “to meet with kindness instead of repelling them with anger and indignation” (Ibid.). The type encouragement involved here may mean to “beseech men to return to better feelings. The continued effort to do good to our enemies is a higher thing even than our endurance” (Goudge, 33).

The word translated “worthless filth” (*perikatharmata*) refers to “refuse, things vile and worthless” (Farrar, 135); “*that which is removed as a result of a thorough cleansing*” (BAG, 653). Thayer (503) says it is a metaphor for, “*the most abject and despicable men.*”

The word translated “scum” (*peripsema*) denotes “a thing scraped off” (Farrar, 135); “*dirt, off-scouring*” (BAG, 659). Thayer (507) notes it is “used in the same sense as *perikatharma*.” This was “the climax of disgrace and contempt” (Alford, 502).

“Until now” means “this moment” with which Paul concludes his sarcastic description of the apostles.

G. Sincere Admonition (4:14-17)

V. 14: “It is not for the purpose of shaming you that I am writing these things but for instructing [you] as my beloved children”

With a modification of his “harsh tone” (Robertson, 109), Paul clarifies his purpose in writing to the Corinthians. The word “shaming” (*entrepon*) means “‘to turn in,’ and so to make a person ‘hang his head,’ as a sign of shame” (Robertson and Plummer, 89). So, his purpose is not of shaming them or making them feel humiliated or ashamed; not to rebuke them in either a cold or a non-caring phlegmatic spirit. That spirit would likely engender resentment or a calloused response.

Rather, he is writing with a “paternal intention” (Alford, 503) or a “fatherly warning” (Parry, 82). His sincere admonition is oriented for their instruction in adjustments they need to make in their Christian pilgrimage. He is teaching them as “my beloved children” (*tekna mou agapeta*). After all, he is their ‘father in the faith,’ the human instrument through whom they came to exercise faith in the God Whose wisdom prompted the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ.

V. 15: “For if you might have countless thousands of instructors in Christ but not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your [father] through the gospel”

The word “instructors” (*paidagogous*) means “tutors, instructors, teachers, guides” – commonly used of those who guide the conduct of children. BAG (608) notes it is literally a “‘boy-leader’, the man, usu. a slave whose duty it was to conduct the boy or youth to and from school and to superintend his conduct gener.” It was their duty to supervise “the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood” (Thayer, 472). This ‘tutor’ provided discipline for the boy.

Paul, on the other hand, is not their ‘tutor’. He is “their *spiritual father* in Christ, while Apollos and the rest are their *tutors* in Christ” (Robertson, 109). Again, he is their ‘father in the faith,’ the human instrument through whom they came to exercise faith in the God Whose wisdom prompted the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ.

V. 16: “Therefore, I encourage you to keep on becoming imitators of me”

With the continued tone of affection and affirmation, Paul encourages them not only to begin but to continually exert efforts of imitating him. Paul is not encouraging them because of his sense of arrogance or excessively inappropriate cockiness or self-centeredness but as a fatherly example of one who is anchored in “humility and self-sacrifice” (Robertson and Plummer, 90). Again, he loves and cares for them and “reserves the right to speak to them on the basis that it was he who introduced them to salvation in Christ Jesus” (Brown, 317).

V. 17: “For this reason I sent to you Timothy who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord who shall remind you of my ways which are in Christ Jesus, just as I am teaching everywhere in every church”

Paul states that he “sent” (*hepemphe*) Timothy as his spokesman to them. He is Paul’s “beloved child” (*teknon agapeton*), just as they were Paul’s “beloved children” (*tekna agapetoi*). He will use this term “beloved” of them again in 10:14 and 15:58.

He sent Timothy who “shall remind” (*anamnesei*) them of Paul’s ways and lifestyle of humility and self-sacrifice oriented in the sphere of his relationship with Christ Jesus. This verb “implies that they had not deliberately disregarded his teachings, merely that they had forgotten them and needed to be reminded” (Berquist, 36).

Paul’s ways or lifestyle are “regulated by” (Findlay, 805) and in concert with what he “is teaching.” He is walking his talking. He is persistent and consistent in what he says and does “everywhere in every church.”

In other words, “Timothy will not impose any special demands upon the Corinthians, but will only bring them into line with what St Paul teaches everywhere” (Robertson and Plummer, 91).

## H. Spurn Arrogance (4:18-21)

V. 18: “Now some have become arrogant as if I were not coming to you”

The word “arrogant” (*ephusiothesan*) first occurred in 4:6. It occurs also in v. 19; 5:2; 8:1, and 13:4. Its only other appearance in the NT is Col. 2:18. It means “to cause conceit, puffed up.” Some in the church were so puffed up with conceit about themselves and their questioning of Paul’s authority and aim that they were sure he would not come to Corinth and face them and the opposition they posed to and for him.

V. 19: “But I myself shall be coming to you soon, if the Lord may want [it], and I shall know not the words of those who are in a state of arrogance but their ability”

Paul quickly bursts their bubble of conceit and cockiness. His coming rests exclusively in the will of the Lord. “Only divine restraint of this kind would stop him” (Morris, 84).

So, with the possible exception of his plans being thwarted by the will of the Lord, he assures them that when he comes, he will know “if there is any substance in these people’s confident boasting or if it will collapse like an inflated balloon when it is pricked – and this is what he expects to happen, for he has reason to believe that all this opposition and pretension to superior knowledge is so much **talk**” (Bruce, 52).

The word translated “state of arrogance” was just used in v. 18 but here is in the perfect tense denoting an *existing* state or condition, and is so translated.

V. 20: “For the kingdom of God is not displayed in words but in ability”

“The kingdom of God” (*he basileia tou thou*) is the reign or rule of God. [For every occurrence of the word ‘kingdom’ in the four gospels, see the **appendix** in “A Harmony of the Gospels” on my personal website: [archive.org/details/@mandm313](http://archive.org/details/@mandm313).]

The “kingdom of God” has a two-fold meaning: it is present in the lives of God’s people as the Christian life is being carried out on this earth; it is also future in terms of its ultimate and perfection completion which will only be realized in heaven.

[For intriguing perspectives on the kingdom of God, see: Robert Shanks’ *Until the Coming of Messiah and His Kingdom*; John Bright’s *The Kingdom of God*; Frank Stagg’s *New Testament Theology* chapter on “the Kingdom of God,” pgs. 149-169; George Eldon Ladd’s *The Gospel of the Kingdom*]. Here, Paul sums up the essence of the kingdom of God in that it is not a matter of profession by men in mere “words” but of the practice by God in



His transforming “work” or “ability” (*dunamin*) to change the lives of those who respond to Him in faith.

“There is probably an intentional contrast with the claims of the Corinthians in verse 8. [For] here is the true royalty” (Morris, 85). Indeed, for expansion, Bloomberg (92) offers these contemplative comments: “This kingly power must not be narrowly conceived. It consists of the edifying manifestation of spiritual gifts, of winning people to Christ and discipling them, of moral living, and of appropriate humble self-assessment, all in striking contrast to the regal roles the Corinthians thought they were playing (v. 8).”

21: “What is your desired preference? May I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of gentleness?”

Having set forth his opposition to the trouble-makers at Corinth in vs. 18-20, he now “concludes with the threat of discipline,” and in the questions he poses, he is “continuing the father-child metaphor; his contrasts [in the two questions] relate to the *manner* of his coming, not the *motive*, which would express love in either case” (Fee, 193).

This is the first occurrence of “love” (*agape*) in this letter and will be used again in 8:1. Further elaboration on its meaning occurs in 13:1, 2, 3, 4 (three times), 8, 13, (twice); also 14:1; 16:14, 24.

Disciplining of children, of course, is an emphatic declaration of love. So, do the Corinthians want him to come with the kind of love which manifests itself in “a spirit of gentleness,” or “one in which the father must punish and discipline his children because they have disgraced the family” (Barrett, 118-119).

Their answer to these questions is up to them, and Paul assures them that he will abide by their decision and act accordingly when he arrives.

### III     DEGRADATIONS (5:1-6:20)

As noted in the preface to 3:16-17 about the relation between the Christian faith and moral matters, in 5:1-14:40, Paul will expand this concern into a superstructure of how this Christ-like character and purity are to be manifested in six areas: **1.** sexual immorality (5:1-13) – **2.** suing (6:1-11) – **3.** sanctity of the body (6:12-20) – **4.** sacred marriage (7:1-40) – **5.** sacrificial meats (8:1-11:1) – **6.** significant worship (11:2-12:40).

More specific facets and features of these ethical matters will be seen in the noted sections of scripture where detailed exposition now begins to unfold.

#### A.     Sexual Immorality (5:1-13)

This section “touches on the question of the man living with his step-mother and insists on his excommunication to preserve the purity of the church” (Morgan-Wayne, 10; see Dilday). On the one hand, this was a most surprising matter, and

on the other hand, it was even a shocking one to the non-Christian residents of the corrupt city of Corinth where such hardly, if ever, happened. The church, like the city, was “intelligent, rich in word and knowledge, but it was also tainted with impurity” (Gould, 5). The superior intellectual syndrome of the city had infected the church with rivalries and divisions. And now this shocking perversion!

This overview of the chapter provides valuable perspectives on its contents:

Vs. 1-2: The charge of incestuous, flagrant fornication among them; the unnamed fornicator is tolerated rather than tried and excommunicated; Vs. 3-5: Paul’s personal pronouncement of expulsion from the church; Vs. 6-8: There can be no boasting about this sinful course of action because it dishonors the sacrifice of Jesus which was designed to provide deliverance from the dominion of sin; V. 9-12: Christians must limit their association with fornicators within the confines of the church, but can never avoid them altogether outside the church; Christians are to discipline their own fellow-believers, not the world at large; Vs. 13: A final command to drive out or cast out this fornicator from their midst. After all, the reputation and influence of the church must not be compromised by ignoring and refusing to discipline this man.

V. 1: “Sexual immorality is frequently being reported among you, even a kind of sexual immorality which [does] not [commonly occur] among the heathen-Gentiles; that is, that someone plans to keep on pursuing [sex] with the wife of his father”

The word translated “sexual immorality” (*porneia* – occurring twice in this verse and elsewhere in 6:13, 18; 7:2) is the Greek word from which the English word “pornography” is transliterated.

The word translated “being reported” is a present tense, passive voice verb indicating ongoing publicity about this vile and repugnant sexual practice. Findlay (807) notes that “while mere **porneia** was excused – not to say approved – in heathen society, even by strict moralists, *such* foulness was abominated [which he classifies as] unparalleled blackness.” Indeed, Blomberg (104) states: “Despite the general moral laxity of the Greco-Roman world, this kind of incest remained one form of sexual sin that was relatively rare and widely condemned there too.” It cannot be definitively concluded as to whether his father was dead or alive.

If the broader meaning is that his plans were to marry his step-mother so as to justify his plans, “notwithstanding the facilities for divorce afforded by the Roman law, and the loose morals of the Corinthians, for a man to marry his stepmother was regarded as a scandal” (Vincent, 210).

If, however, his plans were simply to continue with active sexual intercourse with the woman, a single instance of such foulness would have been irksome enough. However, the present tense infinitive (*echein*) denotes his plans “to keep on pursuing” this reprehensible “illicit relationship of a most unsavory nature” (Berquist, 39). Apparently, the woman was not even a Christian (Lenski, 297;

Farrar, 166). Robertson (111) states that “it was probably a permanent union (concubine or mistress) of some kind without formal marriage.” Indeed, it was not a single occurrence of “one trespass but to a life in sin” (Grosheide, 120).

V. 2: “And why are [many] among you in a state of smugness [about it] and have not rather experienced sorrowful sadness [over it] in order that he who initially committed this evil deed may be removed from among you?”

As strange as it may seem, those in the church who were part of the factions and discord had actually sided with “this scoundrel” and thereby “justified his rascality” (Robertson, 112). The word translated “smugness” (*pephusio-menoi*) is a perfect tense verb which denotes a settled state of being. They were irretrievably locked inside the prison house of conceit, pride, and arrogance from which escape was not possible. “The sin of pride had dazzled them so that they did not see things as they really were” (Grosheide, 120). The sectarians “own superior standing had governed their behavior, rather than a due Christian humility” (Morris, 86).

Those in the church who had not sided with this subversive group of scoundrels were saddened over this man’s actions but not these perverts. Any time sin enters the ranks of the redeemed, the redeemed ones experience sorrow and sadness because of it.

The word translated “sorrowful sadness” (*epenthese*) denotes an intense grieving, mourning, and sorrow over the very sight of sin and its poisonous effects. There is “no intellectual brilliance, no religious enthusiasm [which] can cover this hideous blot” (Findlay, 807).

Rather, prompt and precise action must be undertaken to puncture and pulverize, to demolish and eradicate this deed of darkness. The only way to do this is to remove from their midst the one who perpetrated it. This must be done for the sake of the larger body of Christ in Corinth and its testimony before them and all others in the city. “Like an embedded cancer that requires radical removal by radical surgery, the offending member needed to be removed from the church” (Howard, 52). Indeed, as Robertson (112) observes, even simple “decent self-respect should have compelled the instant expulsion of the man instead of pride in his rascality.”

After all, this “action of banishment is not an action of pride or of hard-heartedness. The honor of God and the holiness of the church are at stake” (Grosheide, 120).

V. 3: “For I indeed, although absent in the body am present in the spirit, have already, as being present, judged the one who perpetrated this perversion”

This is the first occurrence of the word “body” (*soma*) in this letter (6:13 [twice], 15, 16, 18 [twice], 19, 20; 7:4 [twice], 34; 9:27; 10:16, 17; 11:24,

27, 29; 12:12 [thrice], 13, 14, 15 [twice], 16 [twice], 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27; 13:3; 15:35, 37, 38 [twice], 40 [twice] 44 [quad]) – **47 times**. These are the most frequently appearing instances of this word in any single letter in the NT.

Without waiting for his own return to Corinth or pausing to hear how the church effectively deals with the man, Paul sets forth his own attitude about the matter. To him, “the case is so clear in every respect that he finds no reason to hesitate regarding the verdict” (Lenski, 209-210). There should be no committee assembled to investigate the case. Nor should there be a congregational vote where the majority determines the outcome.

Rather, the kind of required disciplinary action on the part of the church should replicate the sentence of excommunication which he here has already passed. Although the name of the man, his age, his socioeconomic status, and other influential factors are not known, the required discipline should arise from the very nature of his actions. The specific details of the discipline are spelled out in the following two verses:

V. 4: “In the name of our Lord Jesus, after having been assembled together and together with my spirit, in the power of our Lord Jesus”

To engage in an action “in the name of our Lord Jesus” means to function in conjunction with His authority and will.

Those physically “assembled together” – “and with [Paul’s] spirit” is not to consist, therefore, “of a few obscure Corinthians” (Morris, 88) or a select group of troublemakers. Apparently, they had never had such a collective meeting.

The added phrase, “in the power of our Lord Jesus” indicates not only an intense awareness of His presence in their midst but also a wholesale cooperation with that action which He Himself has already determined. The specifics are further spelled out in v. 5.

V. 5: “to deliver such a one as this to Satan for [the] destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord”

Bengel notes that this disciplinary decision was “an instance of the highest degree of punishment in the Christian republic, suited to those early times” (190). This delivering to Satan means “to expel him from the fellowship of the church. It may also suggest in some way unclear to us that life outside the church involves placing the man under the direct evil influence of Satan and outside the beneficent influence of Christ” (Brown, 319).

Grosheide (123) suggests this deliverance to Satan is defined by the following words: “*for the destruction of the flesh*. Satan is here viewed as being subject to God who ultimately determines what Satan will be permitted to do and who will also take care that all this will add to His own glory.”

Speculations about the exact meaning of the expression “destruction of the flesh” range from instant physical death to the death of sinful passions; from severe physical illness to a prolonged physical death (Findlay, 809).

Brown’s words (320) are, perhaps, best to follow: “whatever deliverance to Satan and destruction of the flesh may mean, it is clear that Paul anticipates that the man’s *spirit*, his basic self, will be saved at the last judgment. Consequently, the suffering or death the sinner undergoes is not ultimately destructive but redemptive (cf. 3:15).”

Craig (63) offers additional valuable insights in the matter: “Paul’s ultimate objective was to save the man. If it seems a strange method to us, we should reserve harsh criticism of the apostle in the absence of full knowledge of the circumstances.”

John Short’s words (63) are equally important:

The door is not slammed forever, Given a change of heart,  
restoration may come. Yet the discipline is essential. The  
great standards of Christian morality must be sustained.  
By all means let discipline in the first instance be persua-  
sive in its method of dealing with those who have slipped.  
Let Christian fellowship and friendship and helpfulness go  
as far as they possibly can. Above all, let the Master’s own  
method be followed, the method of vicarious suffering.  
There is no power of moral and spiritual uplift and regene-  
ration equal to it. The cross of Jesus Christ is its supreme  
expression, the unveiling of the very heart of God. When  
persuasions fail, however, and men and women are still  
unmoved by the knowledge that their delinquency and  
foolishness are causing suffering to others, then they are  
perilously near to becoming lost souls. Such excommuni-  
cate themselves.

So, “Paul agreed to the death sentence” (Klausner, 553). But the exact nature of that death sentence has always posed a problematic challenge for truth seekers.

V. 6: “Your boasting is not good. Do you not stand in a state of realization that a little yeast causes the whole lump of dough to rise?”

This “boasting” is not “the act of boasting but that in which they boast” (Bruce, 55). The corrupt portion of the Corinthians spoke of their wisdom and spiritual insights but “this case of open immorality is evidence that their reason for boasting is anything but good” (Lenski, 219).

The expression “not good” means it “is not right or to be commended” (Ellicott, 87).

The rhetorical question he raises is in the perfect tense which denotes a permanent state of being, not just an episode or an intermittent happening. Anyone with any sense of rationality or sensibility knows that the example he sets before his readers cannot be answered but in one single way.

Indeed, the kitchen-example Paul now uses illustrates the danger residing within their attitude. A small portion of yeast creates a large or expanded result.

This is true in dietary regulations, as well as within the church, the latter being the thrust of the example. “By keeping the offender within the fold they were retaining that bad influence which could not but spread and infect many. . . . It would in time work throughout their whole being. Sin must be put away rigorously, else in time the entire Christian life will be corrupted” (Morris, 89).

So, the oneness of the Church cannot subject itself to “the consequential danger from evil-doers” (Vincent, 211). Some within the sectarian group likely proposed that tolerating this one case posed no threat or harm but Paul here slays that “specious excuse for negligence” (Robertson, 113).

V. 7: “Clean out the old yeast at once in order that you may be a new lump just as you are without yeast. For Christ our Passover has also been sacrificed”

In the OT, the custom of the Jews was to remove all yeast from their houses in preparation for the Passover Feast. Paul applies this symbolic gesture to the Christians in Corinth in reference to the new character and life which they are to display in attitudes and actions.

In fact, by stating “just as you are without yeast” Paul is not asking them to now make a new start but to consistently and boldly “be and do” what they already were. That is, let your conduct reveal your true, inner character, those essential traits or features which are in step with being new creatures in union with Christ Jesus. Simply put, “their normal, prevailing character as Christians regenerated and holy, to which he would have their present action and condition correspond” (Gould, 46).

Just as the Jewish Passover was the reason or occasion for the Jews to abstain from food with yeast in it, indicting no time to wait or delay, so the sacrifice of Christ, as the paschal lamb of God, is the reason why these Christians should abstain from or put away all forms of sin, especially sexual ones.

V. 8: “Accordingly, let us keep on observing the festival [of the Passover] neither with old yeast nor with the yeast of malice and evil intentions but with the elements of sincerity and truth”

The word translated “let us keep on observing the festival” (*heortazomen*) “is a figure of the Christian life” (BAG, 279). Indeed, “the Christian’s Paschal feast does not last for a week, but all his life” (Godet, 266).

The additional words and phrases define in what manner the Christian life *is*

and *is not* measured and/or demonstrated.

The “is not” consists of “malice” (*kakias*) and refers to “*malignity, malice, ill-will, desire to injure; wickedness* that is not ashamed to break the laws, *depravity; evil, trouble*” (Thayer, 320). It is opposed to truth. Trench (38-40) says it

is not so much viciousness as a special form of vice but more the evil habit of mind; a baseness of nature by which we take things by the wrong handle, and expound things always in the worst sense; giving to all words and actions of others their most unfavorable interpretation; a constant attribution of the actions of others the worst imaginable motives.

The “is not” also consists of “evil intentions” (*ponerias*) or one who works actively out of evil. Thayer (316) quotes Jeremy Taylor who explains it as an “aptness to do shrewd turns, to delight in mischiefs and tragedies; a loving to trouble our neighbour and to do him ill offices; crossness, perverseness, and peevishness of action.” Thayer adds, “the *kakos* may be content to perish in his own corruption, but the *poneros* is not content unless he is corrupting others as well, and drawing them into the same destruction with himself.” So, “malice” refers to “the inward principle” of one’s life and “evil intentions” refers to “the manifestation and outcome of it in actions” (Ellicott, 89).

On the other hand, the positive parameters of the Christian life are marked by spiritual soundness or stability and ethical guidelines.

The “is” consists of “sincerity” (*eilikrineias*) or purity and honesty. It is to be “*unmixed*, then *pure* in moral sense or motive” (BAG, 221). This refers to being careful “not to admit evil with the good” (Bengel, 191). Moffatt (59) says this refers to “personal character devoid of private ends, with no unconquered selfishness or conceit. Here it is the stainless life of a community, straightforward and consistent, unsullied by any worldly compromise.” Robertson and Plummer add: “transparency, limpid purity, ingenuousness” (104).

The “is” also consists of “truth” (*aletheias*) which is careful “not to admit evil instead of good” (Bengel, 191). It pursues the opposite of evil, wickedness, and vices of any sorts. This does not mean “*truthfulness*, but moral truth as opposed to error” (Gould, 47).

Taken together, these positive parameters indicate that “only the clean life can enjoy the festival” (Moffatt, 59).

V. 9: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people”

Paul here alludes to some previous correspondence he had with the church but which is unknown or lost. However, in it he wrote, to some extent, about avoiding continuous contacts with sexually immoral people.

In fact, the word here translated “not to associate” (*me sunanamignusthai*) is composed of three significant separate terms, and “strictly denotes living in an intimate and continuous relation with one” (Godet, 270:

*sun* – “with, in company with, along with, together with, intimacy”

*ana* – “in the middle, between; in the midst of (BAG, 49) in the sense of “the repetition of the acts” (Godet, 270).

*mignummi* – “to mix, mingle with”

The term primarily “forbids social intimacy, while those who wished to misunderstand took it as a prohibition of all [social] intercourse” (Findlay, 811).

He will clarify his original intention in verses 10-1.

The KJV translates the last word in this verse: “fornicators” (*pornois*). The NASV, Williams, the RSV, and here translate: “immoral or sexually immoral people.”

Beare (140), however, resists the translation of the RSV, “the immoral,” instead of “fornicators,” calling it an “intolerable bowdlerism [to alter words in a book thought to be improper].”

Beck translates, “those who live in sexual sin.”

Altogether, regardless of the preferred translation, the central thrust of this word denotes “one who practices sexual immorality.” Its prohibitive significance is captured in the words of Hauck and Schulz (593):

As individuals are to steer clear of *porneia*, so it is the apostle’s supreme concern to keep the [Christian] communities free from such sins, since toleration of the offender makes the whole church guilty and constitutes an eschatological threat. . . . The *porneia* of individual members makes the whole church unclean and threatens the whole work of the apostle, which is to present pure communities to Christ.

V. 10: “Not all the immoral people of this world or the over-reachers and extortioners or idolaters, for in that case you must disappear from the world”

The word “idolaters” (*eidololatrais*) appears here for the first time in this letter. It occurs again in 5:11, 6:9; 10:7. [It occurs elsewhere in the NT: Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:8; 22:15.]

To puncture any misunderstandings of Paul’s original meaning, he specifies that his limitations about not associating with sexually immoral people is confined to people in the church (Robertson and Plummer, 90). After all,



there were “family, economic, and fraternal ties which could not be completely severed” (Craig, 65). Sheer common sense should have avoided any misinterpretation of his meaning. But when dealing with others who lack common sense, logic, and rationality, as is the case with those who taught toleration of evil in the church, clarifications are needed. To be *literal* in interpretation of every word and phrase can be a hindrance to truth when literal-mindedness circulates around interpretative principles which violate intended meanings. In fact, “the consequences might well be devastating” (Short, 65) – as Paul is pointing out.

It is impossible to serve God in the world if you are no longer in it; in which case, your disappearance from the world would nullify Paul’s very principle altogether. Again, Paul’s limitation is for Christians to never nestle themselves with such perverts. “They are therefore especially to be avoided, who among Christians wish to be considered more virtuous than others, and yet are *fornicators*, etc.” (Bengel, 192).

Lest anyone continues to misunderstand him, in the next verse, he employs more concrete terms which should abort any delusions about the matter.

V. 11: “But now I write to you not to associate with anyone being named a brother if he may be a sexually immoral person or an over-reacher or an idolater or a slanderer or a drunkard or a swindler, not to eat together with such a person”

“Now” that you see or understand “that the earlier letter meant something different” (Robertson and Plummer, 106), I am writing to make sure that you understand that restrictions apply only to one who is being called “a brother.” For if a “brother” is actively engaged in any of the following six particulars, he has thereby brought disgrace to the very name and “has forfeited the right to it” (Ibid.). These are 6 forms of immorality (Bruce, 57):

1. “a sexually immoral person” ( *pornos* ) – This is the same term noted above. This is fornication and “is a sin against *a man’s own self*. By falling to it he has reduced himself to the level of an animal; he has sinned against the light that is in him and the highest that he knows. He has allowed his lower nature to defeat his higher and made himself less than a man” (Barclay, 47-48).
2. “an over-reacher” ( *pleonektes* ) – This is the same term noted above. This greediness and a sin against *our neighbors and our fellow men*. It regards human beings as persons to be exploited rather than as brothers to be helped. It forgets that the only proof that we do love God must be the fact that we love our neighbours as ourselves” (Barclay, 48).
3. “an idolater” ( *eidololatrias* ) – This is the same term noted above. This is a sin against *God*. It allows things to usurp God’s place. It is the failure

- to give God the first and only place in life” (Ibid.).
4. “a slanderer” (*loidoros*) – This term occurs in the NT only here and 6:10. This is a “*reviler, abusive person*” (BAG, 480). According to Hanse (294), “the Christian does not revile again when reviled. He does not answer railing with railing (1 Pt. 3:9).”
  5. “a drunkard” (*methusos*) – This term occurs in the NT only here and 6:10. It is used in regard to “both sexes” (BAG, 500). According to Preisker (547), the term occurs “only in the list of vices [and means] to be drunk and to get drunk.”
  6. “a swindler” (*harpax*) – This refers to one who is “*rapacious, ravenous* like wolves; a *robber*” (BAG, 108; Thayer, 75). Both the AV and RV translate, “extortioner.”

The prohibition of even socially eating with such a person – “in public or in private” (Mofatt, 62) – is designed for protection against insinuations, accusations, and diluted testimonies.

It appears that “Paul was giving in this letter *his* idea [as contrasted with the Jewish idea] of what constituted a ‘kosher’ table for Christians, with all the emphasis on the company rather than the viands [articles of choice foods]” (Manson, 197).

V. 12: “For what [business it is] to me to judge outsiders? Do you not judge the insiders?”

This refers to those who are outside the church and are “not within Paul’s jurisdiction. God passes judgment on them” (Robertson, 116). However, it is the responsibility of Christians to judge, rebuke, and correct those within the church.

Brown (321) notes that “to belong to God in Christ is to live a disciplined life in the eyes of the world and to exercise discipline as a responsible member of the church.” This responsibility lies in the hands of the entire congregation and not to the authority figures in the church.

V. 13: “But God judges the outsiders. **Remove the sexually immoral person from among yourselves.**”

This quotation is from Deut. 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7 whereby “Paul clinches the case for the expulsion of the offender” (Robertson, 116).

The word “remove” (*exarate*) is the second imperative or command in this chapter (cp. 5:7). As Morris (93) points out, “the application of all this to the modern scene is not easy. Our different circumstances must be taken into account. But Paul’s main point, that the church must not tolerate the presence of evil in its midst, is clearly of permanent relevance.”

The words of Berquist (44) deserve echoing:

In this sophisticated age of easy morals, loose living, multiple marriages, and overemphasis upon sex, how exceedingly important it is for church people to give serious heed to the earnest appeals of Paul for a disciplined church membership and an unleavened church – a church cleansed of worldliness, distinctly different from the surrounding environment, a church and a people in tune with the times but in touch with eternity and with a holy God!

B. Suing (6:1-11)

This section touches on “the issue of litigation among church members. Paul disapproves of such steps and believes that there ought to be church members wise enough to adjudicate in such disputes. He also raises the deeper implications of their quarrels – a failure in fellowship and a failure in the capacity to receive wrong without retaliation” (Morgan-Wynne, 10; see Dilday).

This overview of this part of the chapter provides valuable perspective on its content: Vs. 1-6: Since Christians are to eventually judge the world and angels, they certainly should be able to resolve disputes between themselves. Vs. 7-8: Instead of lawsuits, they should be willing to be wronged rather than wrong others. Vs. 9-10: After all, people who are unjust are people who cannot inherit the kingdom of God. V. 11: Since these Christians had been delivered from the practices of evil, they should mirror such deliverance in their attitudes and actions toward others.

Lenski (233) lays out the line of Pauline thought in the matter:

- 1) Litigation before pagan courts is unworthy of Christian congregation.
- 2) Difficulties between brethren should be adjusted within the congregation.
- 3) The very occurrence of such difficulties disgraces a congregation.
- 4) All such *adikia* should have disappeared when the Corinthians became Christians.

V. 1: “How can any one of you who has a dispute against another one dare to be judged before the unrighteous and not before the saints?”

This rhetorical question (designed to stimulate, persuade or influence the thinking-acting process) according to Robertson and Plummer (110) “is an argument in itself.” It is sheer shame to even consider this as a Christian option. This is no way to settle a “dispute” (*pragma* – “matter, thing, af-

fair; event, happening, deed; lawsuit) between fellow-Christians.

The word “against” (*pros*) indicates “reciprocity, for each of the two has something against the other. One sets up his claim, and the other sets up a counterclaim with the result that the aggravating matter remains unsettled” (Lenski, 234).

The word “dare” (*tolma*) means “to be brave or bold enough” to take a legal matter to a non-Christian judge who is “unrighteous” (*adikon*). Here the word “dare” is used “in a weak sense” (Fitzer, 184) indicating that “Paul thinks it quite inappropriate” (Ibid, 185) to do so.

Any Jews among the congregation would never pursue this pathway since it would indicate speaking and acting against the law. So, it is likely that the Greeks or Gentiles were involved. This would fit because they already “were fond of disputatious lawsuits with each other” (Robertson, 117).

The nature or grounds for refuting and attacking such pursuits is clearly laid out with powerful and penetrating perspectives in verses 2-3.

V. 2: “Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incapable of trivial matters?”

The verse opens with two other rhetorical questions designed to shock their senses.

The word “saints” (*hagioi*) is a common word in the NT to denote those who have been set apart by God and for His service.

The “world” is “the sinful world to which the pagan judges belong . . . the church ought to remember her own glory but should also realize that she turns the existing order of things upside down” (Grosheide, 134).

In other words, because Christians are living by faith in Jesus Christ, their very lifestyle is a judgment or condemnation against the wicked ways of the world.

It is a “*virtual* judgment of the world, lying in the faith of the saints as contrasted with its unbelief” (Findlay, 814).

As partners with the Lord in His Lordship and kingly rule or reigning over the world, they approve or share in His judgment against the wicked ways of the world and its rebellion against Him.

The second occurrence of the word “judge” (*krinetai* – “is to be judged”) is in the present tense and passive voice, as indicated by the translation above.

As Farrar (192) observes: “the present points to the future, as though that which is inevitable is already in course of fulfillment.”

Still others think it refers *entirely* to the future of “the eschatological judgment day” (Brown, 322; Robertson, 117; Morris, 93-94; Berquist, 45).

Whatever its exact or intended meaning, Short (70 asserts:

since it is the destiny of the Christian saints to judge the world, they ought not to descend to the triviality and absurdity of going to law against one another in the courts of the very pagans

they are destined to judge. As prospective judges of the world, they ought surely to be repositories of sufficient wisdom to handle their own affairs with equity. There ought – and the famous irony breaks through here – to be at least one person among them who might judge in such matters.

V. 3: “Do you not know that we shall judge angels - how much more of things pertaining to everyday life?”

The addition of “angels” further reenforces the shocking effects of Paul’s rhetorical approach.

To judge “the angels” indicates that Christians are “above the angels [since] they have been acquitted already and participate in the judgment of the angels” (Grosheide, 135).

Edwards (139) notes:

The thought that the saints will pass sentence of condemnation on fallen angels is but the complement of the doctrine taught by Paul that they here wrestle against principalities, powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). The contest will end in the defeat of the evil spirits (cf. Luke 10:19-20).

Craig (70) maintains that “the **angels** are mentioned as the most important part of the world over which they are to exercise sovereignty under God.”

So, by “drawing on Daniel 7:22, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they will help Jesus exercise judgment over the non-Christian world (both people and angels)” (Blomberg, 117).

In concert with Farrar (192), it is futile to speculate “as to the manner and extent in which the saints shall share in the work of Christ as Judge of the quick and dead.” There should be sufficient satisfaction in its sheer factual reality.

V. 4: “Therefore, if you may have courts pertaining to everyday life, do you select someone as a judge those who have been treating the church with contempt?”

Brown (322) observes that Paul is not saying that “Roman or Corinthian courts are incapable of executing justice or discrediting the legal capacity of the Corinthian judges but rebuking the moral insensitivity of the Corinthian Christians.” After all, they have “courts pertaining to everyday life,” that is, “tribunals dealing with worldly matters” (Robertson and Plummer, 113).

Rather, Paul’s position is a “religious” one and “proves that [they] have not

a truly high Church-consciousness” (Moffatt, 65).

The phrase “those who have been treating the church with contempt” (*tous exouthenemenous en te ekklesia*) means the heathen or “unrighteous” as in v. 1. This is a perfect tense participle indicating that they have been and still are in the process of despising and rejecting the church. Will God’s will be done before such judges?!

Morris (95) sets the stage as follows: “In accepting the standards of Christ Christians have deliberately set aside the standards of the world. These standards are nothing. Those who judge by them are nothing.” Richard F. Weymouth’s *The New Testament in Modern Speech* captures the sarcasm this way: “If therefore you have things belonging to this life which need to be decided, is it men who are absolutely nothing in the Church – it is *they* whom you make your judges?”

V. 5: “I am saying this to you for the sake of stimulating shame. So, is there not one wise person among you who shall be able to make a judgment between his brethren?”

The word “shame” (*entropen*) occurs in the NT only here and 15:34. They should “feel ashamed” (Beck) or “blush with shame” (Williams) because “surely they will not admit that they have no brother fit to arbitrate” (Edwards, 140). In language of years gone by, Paul is saying that he wants to shame them “by showing how little importance [he] attaches to those wretched interests for which you do not scruple to compromise the honour of the church” (Godet, 291). Or the smoother English by Brown (32): “How can a person whose life has been transformed bring himself to the point of admitting the failure of his discipleship to the point that he must ask a person who has no knowledge of the power of the Holy Spirit to decide a case between him and another Christian?”

So, Paul continues to puncture the pride or pusillanimity [cowardice] of his readers: “the use of *adelphou* has a sharp reflection on them for their going to heathen judges to settle disputes between brothers in Christ” (Robertson, 118).

V. 6: “But brother against brother is being judged, and that before judges with no faith [in Jesus Christ]?”

Paul now answers the question of v. 5 with these words of sad commentary. Robertson and Plummer (115) frame it most adequately: “That there should be disputes about *biotika* {“things pertaining to this life” – vs. 3, 4] is bad; that Christian should go to law with Christian is worse; that Christians should do this before unbelievers is worst of all.”

V. 7: “Actually, then, it is already a failure for you that you are having law-

suits against one another. Why not suffer being wronged? Why not suffer being robbed?”

Their shame is seen in their “failure, defeat” (*hettema*) or existing degradation by these lawsuits. “This was proof of the failure of love and forgiveness” (Robertson, 119). No wonder he expands the meaning of love in Ch. 13. These two closing questions resurrect the words of Jesus in Lk. 6: 27-30. It is better to “endure injustice” and “being defrauded” (Weymouth), as Jesus did, if the true pattern of Christian living is to be displayed in a world of injustice and fraudulent behaviors.

V. 8: “But you yourselves are practicing wrong and robbing [others] - even the brothers”

However, instead of displaying Christlike behaviors – even between fellow Christians - they were engaged in behaviors which were as corrupt and pagan as their non-Christian opponents or adversaries. The type of sacrificial love exhibited by Jesus was to be applicable to Christian brothers. However, that which was to be “the surest distinctive [and] strongest witness of a vital relationship with the Lord” (Berquist, 48) was sadly and shockingly missing from their arsenal of behavioral repertoire.

V. 9: “Or do you not know that the unrighteousness shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither fornicators nor idolaters, neither adulterers nor homosexual perverts”

No matter how minor or irrelevant Paul’s previous points were viewed by his readers, he now becomes much more concrete or specific in words which could not be viewed as minor, irrelevant, or subject to misunderstanding. His question and itemized answers are designed to rock the boat of reality. After all, these answers, he reminds them in v. 11, once described some of them but should do so no longer. Those who are “unrighteous” and practice behaviors like the following thereby reveal that they are not now among those living under the reign and rule of God. To think otherwise to fall under the canopy of “being deceived” (*planasthe*) or led astray from the truth of God.

1. “fornicators” (*pornoi*) – “one who practices sexual immorality” (BAG, 700); “general term covering all forms of sexual sin” (Morris, 97); “this includes all trespasses of the seventh commandment” (Grosheide, 140); “the act of *fornication*, and much more the habit” (Bengel, 195); this was “the besetting sin of Corinth. Hence the numerous solemn and emphatic allusions to it in this epistle. See ch. 5:11; 6:15-18; 10:8” (Vincent, 215);
2. “idolaters” (*eidololatrai*) – “those who are covetous” (BAG, 220); “the immorality of much heathen worship of the day” (Morris, 97);

this “stands between fornication and adultery, for it was connected with these crimes” (Bengel, 195);

3. “adulterers” (*moichoi*) – “those specifically who violate the marriage bed” (Morris, 97);
4. “sensual, effeminate” (*malakoi*) – “soft, esp. of *catamites*, men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually” (BAG, 489); *voluptuous* [sensual pleasure by fulness and beauty of form]; giving pleasure to the senses; “general addiction to sins of the flesh” (Findlay, 817); “passive homosexuality” (Bruce, 61); “those indulging in soft and luxurious living” (Gould, 52);
5. “homosexual perverts” (*arsenokoitai*) – “a male homosexual, pederast, sodomite” (BAG, 109); “whose sin of Sodom was widely and shamelessly practised by the Greeks” (Findlay, 817); “abusers of themselves with men designates active homosexuals” (Grosheide, 140; Bruce, 61);

V. 10: “neither thieves nor over-reachers, no drunkards, no slanderers, no swindlers shall inherit the kingdom of God”

6. “thieves” (*kleptai*) – “the breaking in of a thief as a figure for someth. sudden, surprising, unexpected” (BAG, 435);
7. “over-reachers” (*pleonektai*) – “one who is greedy for gain, a covetous person, whose ways are judged to be extremely sinful by the Christians and many others” (BAG, 673); “people who are always after the property of another even though they may not actually steal” (Grosheide, 140);
8. “drunkards” (*methusoi*) – “used of both sexes, though the older writers used it only of women” (BAG, 500);
9. “slanderers” (*loidoroi*) – “reviler, abusive person” (BAG, 480);
10. “swindlers” (*harpages*) – “robbery, plunder” (BAG, 108); “expresses violence” (Grosheide, 140);

All of these sins “share the common traits of being self-indulgent, self-serving, and from a spiritual perspective, they also become self-destructive” (Blomberg, 121).

V. 11: “And some of you used [to do] these things; but you washed yourselves clean, but you have been set apart, but you have been declared righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God”

By narrowing his words to “some of you,” Paul escapes overgeneralization or any wholesale accusations about one and all.

Also, his use of *hete* and the customary imperfect tense denotes “that which has regularly or ordinarily occurred in past time, and ‘used to’ is generally a good rendering” (Dana and Mantey, 188), as here.

Paul now uses the adversative conjunction “but” (*alla*) three times to denote a



radical departure from such behavioral vices. His word is clear and plain: “but do not go back to them” (Robertson, 120). WHY? Because:

1. “you washed yourselves clean” (*apelousasthe*) – “This was their own voluntary act in baptism which was the outward expression of the previous act of God” (Robertson, 120) in their new birth or regeneration. Paul is “referring to baptism, the experience in which the believer dies to sin (Rom. 6:6) so that sin will no longer reign in him” (Craig, 72).
2. “you have been set apart” (*hagiassthe*) – This previous act of God led to God’s setting them apart from the world and unto Himself for service in a life of holiness and consecration. This is the verbal form of the noun “sanctification” and the lifelong process of growth in Christian character and conduct. Despite the cleansing here noted, “yet the letter indicates at the same time how incomplete is the sanctification which these Christians have obtained” (Ibid.). As Short (72) adds, “Having been cleansed at such cost, they were now no longer their own, but Christ’s folk. Such reprehensible conduct was utterly inconsistent with both their experience and with their profession of faith. They were jeopardizing their ‘standing’ before God and their ‘prospects.’ How could his Holy Spirit rule in such hearts?” (Ibid.).
3. “you have been declared righteous” (*adikaiothete*) – This refers to God’s imparting His very own righteousness to them. Cp. my commentary on Romans for a fuller perspective on the meaning of this word and its cognates: [archive.org/details/@mandm313](http://archive.org/details/@mandm313).

The added phrase, “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” sums up the baptismal confession; *the Spirit of our God* constitutes the power by which that confession is inspired, and the regeneration effectuated which makes it good” (Findlay, 818). The word “name” (*onomati*) denotes “authority and right to rule.” It also “brings out the dignity of Him whom we serve” (Morris, 98). The phrase “the Spirit of our God” also indicates that the “power manifest for Christian living is not human but divine power, given by the very Spirit of God Himself” (Ibid.).

#### C. Sanctity of Body (6:12-20)

This section “constitutes a kind of transition from dealing with issues learned unofficially to dealing with those raised by the official letter (7:1), and, since it deals with sexual matters, affords an easy transition into the questions handled in chap.7” (Morgan-Wynne, 10; Dilday).

This overview of this part of the chapter provides valuable perspectives on its content: Vs. 12-14: The idea that all things are lawful or allowable cannot be used to justify sexual sins. In fact, Paul stresses that not all things, sexually and dietarily, are profitable since the Christian’s body belongs to God and must be set apart for Him and His purposes. Vs. 15-17: Sexual sins, for example,

classify one as being part of or equal to harlotry, regardless of the rationale one may use to justify such behaviors. Vs. 18-20: Sexual sins are sins against the body which houses the Holy Spirit and violates the purpose for which the body has been created for use in His service.

V. 12: “All things are permitted for me but all things are not profitable. All things are permitted for me but I will not be made a slave by means of anything.”

The word translated “all things” (*Panta*) should not be understood in an unlimited or concrete sense. If that were the case, then sexual immorality could be understood as a permissible matter, as in fact, was taking place in Corinth. Paul, rather “limits the proverb to things not immoral, things not wrong *per se*” (Robertson, 120);

After all, “all things are not profitable.” That is, are not always good for us or does not match or fit together into the framework of God’s design for our lives. In fact, we do not have “any right to do what in itself is innocent, when our doing it will have a bad effect on others [and potentially] on ourselves. Our liberty is abused when our use of it weakens our character and lessens our power of self-control.” (Robertson and Plummer, 122).

Even though “all things are permitted for me,” this freedom must not set the stage for slavery to anything. “In other words, ‘boundless intemperance’ may become a tyranny. The pretense of moral freedom may end in a moral bondage” (Farrar, 193). So, Paul asserts that he will be “master over [his] liberty by keeping it under the beneficent control of law and of charity” (Ibid.).

V. 13: “Foods [are] for the stomach and the stomach [is] for foods. But God will do away with these things. And the body is not for immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.”

By way of analogy with the commonly understood link between food and the stomach, the corrupt ones at Corinth seemingly implied that sexual immorality is just as normal as eating. Their reasoning leaves more than a bit to be desired. So, Paul navigates away from their line of thinking to paint a more pertinent and pragmatic picture. Foods and the stomach will eventually be discarded and no longer necessary. But since the body is made for the Lord and the Lord is for the body, it is not to be discarded and/or destroyed.

Rather, the body “falls within the scope of Christ’s saving and sanctifying work” (Bruce, 63). In fact, the body is “the instrument wherein a man serves God. It is the means whereby he glorifies (i.e., makes known) God. It is only as God enables that we can live the kind of bodily life for which we were meant” (Morris, 100).

These are the first two occurrences of the word “body” in this chapter: v. 15, 16, 18 (twice), 19, 20. Its significance is seen in each occurrence.

V. 14: “And the God Who even raised up the Lord shall also raise us up through His ability.”

The dignity of the body is further reenforced by the fact that God raised up from the dead the very body of Jesus Christ. How can the body, therefore, be seen as insignificant or unimportant?!

And the ultimate significance of His body being raised from the dead is the very cornerstone or foundation of the resurrection of the bodies of His people. He will elaborate on this in chapter 15.

Here, however, it is sufficient to note that the ability to raise up the body of Jesus and that of His followers is attributable exclusively to God’s dynamics. It is this reality of the resurrection of the body which “forbids us to take the body lightly” (Morris, 100).

V. 15: “Do you not know that your bodies are in vital union with Christ? Is it [appropriate] then [for] having taken away members in vital union with Christ and deliberately made them members in vital union with a prostitute? May it never be!”

Paul continues to punctuate the superlative significance of the body and its connection of a vital union with Christ. Thus, “the body is not only *for* the Lord (ver. 13), *adapted* for Him: it is also *united* with Him” (Vincent, 216).

As Gould (54) notes:

Christ is so united with our spirit, that our actions become in a sense his; and hence our bodies become instruments of his action. . . . This is the horrible thing that Paul makes of fornication. He shows the sacredness of the body on the one hand, and the relation into which fornication brings it with the harlot on the other; and out of this he constructs his startling question. ‘Shall I take the body that belongs to Christ, and give it to a harlot, making it hers?’ The question he answers with the usual negative, implying repulsion, **God forbid** – or, literally, *let it not come to pass*.

V. 16: “Or do you not know that the one who unites himself with the prostitute is one body [with her]? For it means, **the two shall become one flesh**.”

This question which begins, “do you not know” occurs here for the fifth time in this chapter (vs. 2, 3, 9, 15). It is, as always, a throbbing question designed to awaken and arouse his readers into reality.

More specifically, Paul is so pumped at this point, “that he actually applies to illicit passion or cohabitation what was originally used of married love” (Moffat, 70). Indeed, the word “unites” (*kollomenos*) is closely connected with the English word *glue*, and denotes “a most intimate union” (Edwards, 148). He transforms the ordinary quotation from Gen. 2:24 about marriage to the crisis at hand about sexual immorality with a prostitute. “As often as a person has intercourse with a harlot, he becomes one flesh with her. A union like that is not broken off, it is always existing” (Grosheide, 149). In other words, “the fornicative act makes one single body of the two” (Lenski, 263).

In such case, the body is not yielded to the service of the Lord but yielded to the service of sinful pursuits, passions, and perversions.

V. 17: “But the one who is uniting himself with the Lord is spiritually one [with Him].”

On the other hand, the one who *glues himself* to and with the Lord and His mission is experiencing and expressing “loyal and permanent adherence, resulting in complete spiritual union. This is placed in marked contrast to the temporary physical union which is so monstrous” (Robertson and Plummer, 126).

V. 18: “Keep on running away from sexual immorality. Every [other] sin a man may have committed is outside the body, but the one committing sexual immorality is sinning against his own body.”

The present tense imperative mood verb here indicates the best way to resist sexual immorality is to always FLEE from it. As Farrar (194) notes, “in the battle against sexual sins, there is no victory except in absolute flight.”

The reason why is deposited rather forcefully. Every other act of sin may betray one’s sensibilities and surely stain the body in some fashion. “But none are so directly against the sanctity of the whole bodily being as fornication” (Farrar, 194).

Indeed, the persistent practice of sexual immorality is actually sinning against his own body, and thereby, against the Lord Who owns the body. As Brown (326) observes: “Sexual immorality involves a degradation of the sexual relationship, an indifference to the claim of Christ over personality, and a denial of the sanctity of the body for future fellowship with God.”

In other words, the practice of sexual immorality alienates and separates the practitioner from the God-designated service into which he was called. The practitioner also becomes a corrupt cohort “by incorporating it with the degradation of another” (Farrar, 194) in sinful stains.

The practitioner also poisons his own inner being with perversions which lead to various defilements and harmful consequences.

V. 19: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, Whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”

As if to shout from the rooftop through blarring megaphones, Paul staggers and stabs his readers with a question which should shake them to the very foundation of their beings.

In ch. 3:16, Paul identified the entire Christian community as being the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Here, his stress is upon each and every one within the community as being the dwelling place of that same Spirit.

With this spiritually dynamic perspective on the human body, “if you deny the fatal violence done to your body by fornication, you are ignorant of the holy dignity to which it is destined, and of which it is deprived by this sin” (Godet, 313).

Indeed, “nothing so outrages God and alienates the Christian as a loose behavior which assumes that he has the right to do as he pleases with what he has allowed God to possess” (Moffatt, 70).

Again, the reality of the Holy Spirit coming to dwell in body of believers as “this Divine Guest” (Godet, 313) should jolt his readers into an unforgettable realization that the dignity of the body cannot be disdained.

The body belongs to God, as the following verse legitimizes:

V. 20: “For you have been bought with a valuable price; Therefore make God’s presence known with your bodies.”

The word “bought” (*hegorasthete*) indicates that the purchase price for their bodies has been made. Moule (39) prefers “*you were bought for a price*” (cf. vii. 23). Even though “it is not said who has bought them, or from whom they are bought, or at what cost” (Buchsel, 125), it surely is consistent with what Peter identified in 1 Pt. 1:19: “the blood of Christ,” and what Jesus stated in Mt. 20:28: “to give His life a ransom for many.”

So, it is here termed “a valuable price” (*times*). Indeed, “the effect of Christ’s death for us is that we are redeemed from slavery and prison, and the right of our possession is with Christ” (Farrar, 195).

The word translated “make known” (*doxasate*) is more commonly translated “glorify” (KJV, NAS, Beck) which is absolutely correct. But since the word actually means ‘to make known among men,’ the above translation is used. So, the bodies of Christians must be used in a such a manner that the presence of God within them is unmistakably manifested.

Godet’s (315) summary of the main truths in this passage deserves repetition:

1. That the use of Christian liberty as respects the body is naturally restricted by the danger of using that liberty so as to alienate it and destroy ourselves.
2. That fornication involves the Christian in a degrading physical solidarity, incompatible with the believer's spiritual solidarity with Christ.
3. That it [fornication] renders the body unfit for its Christian dignity as a temple of God, and so for its glorious destination.

It appears from this entire development that contempt of the body goes side by side with abuse of the body, while respect for the body will always be the best means of ruling it. And so the whole of Scripture, from the first page of Genesis to the last of Revelation, pays homage to the dignity of the human body.

#### IV DIRECTIVES (7:1-14:40)

This section touches on “several questions which the official church letter raised: should Christian couples have sex? should engaged couples get married. . . . From 7:1 onwards Paul answers the queries of the official letter. 7:1-24, he permits abstinence from sex, provided that the couple agreed, they devote themselves to prayer, and the abstinence is temporary only. Other issues are dealt with in vv. 8-24 (e.g. divorce). 7:25-40, while preferring that couples should remain unmarried in the short period before the End, Paul assures those who want to get married that they will not be sinning by doing so. But the unmarried can devote all their time to the service of Christ” (Morgan-Wynne, 7, 11-12; Dilday).

This overview of this part of the letter provides valuable perspectives on its content: Vs. 1-2: Celibacy and its advantage; Vs. 3-5: The duties entailed in the case of marriage; V. 6-7: Marriage is not commanded and he desires them to be like himself; Vs. 8-9: The advantage of celibacy and when marriage is necessary; V. 10-11: The Lord's command against divorce; V. 12-16: Special instances of marriage between Christians and non-Christians; Vs. 17-24: Application of the general principle “that God means that they should remain in the state of life where the call to be Christians found them” (Gould, 56); Vs. 25-38: The special case of unmarried daughters and the responsibilities of fathers in giving them in marriage; and the pertinent trials of life; Vs. 39-40: Wives are bound to their husbands while he is living but are free to marry another after his death, although they may be happier to remain unmarried.

##### A. Sacred Marriage (7:1-40)

V. 1: “Now with reference to what you wrote: it is good for a man not to touch a woman.”

Moule (63) calls the word “what” (*hon*) “a virtually ‘absolute’ usage and translates “*the things you wrote about*.”

“What you wrote” is obviously referring to some previously written letter from the church about certain problems related to marriage. Paul does not say, in a generalized manner, that marriage is not good but that “celibacy may be good in certain” cases (Robertson, 124).

Chapter 6, of course, “dealt with libertines who argued that everything was permissible, and in particular that sexual license was a matter of ethical indifference” (Bruce, 66).

Chapter 7, on the other hand, is a response to the other extreme: i.e., any and all sexual relations, even in marriage, were to be completely avoided. So, Paul says, “no” to both. His own pitch is that it is “good not to touch a woman,” meaning that “there is value in persons not marrying and living a celibate life” (Brown, 328).

The word “good” (*kalon*) means “suitable, for liberty and exemption from the *due*, ver. 3, and for entire *power* over oneself, ver. 4” (Bengel, 198).

Vincent (217) adds, “not merely expedient, but morally salutary. The statement, however, is to be made in the light of circumstances, see ver. 26, and is to be read with others, such as 2 Cor. 11:2; Rom. 7:4; Eph. 5:28-33.” Cp. Alford, 519; Edwards, 156 for the same ideology.

Robertson and Plummer (132) note “a single life is not wrong; on the contrary, it is laudable . . . this he repeats in vv. 8, 26.”

The verb “not to touch” (*me haptesthai*) is a euphemism for “not to marry”; or of forbidding “intercourse w. a woman” (BAG, 102); “of carnal intercourse with a woman, or cohabitation” (Thayer, 70) outside the boundary of marriage.

V. 2: “but because of sexual immoralities, let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband”

The word “sexual immoralities” (*porneias*) in the plural refers to “the many instances of fornication current . . . repetition, or varieties of the occurrence” (Alford, 520).

The primary meaning of “his own wife and her own husband” is the avoidance of “polygamy, which was advocated by some Jewish teachers” (Robertson and Plummer, 133).

Paul is not advocating marriage in the sense that this is the only or primary reason or way to avoid various forms of fornications. However, he is stressing that because of its God given origin, it does provide a safeguard against such forms.

In fact, as Calvin (225) notes: “the question is not as to the reasons for which marriage has been instituted, but as to the persons for whom it is necessary.”

Plus, it does realistically pose “a lesser risk upon the whole than any overstrained attempt to practice the celibate life” (Moffatt, 75-76). Nevertheless, marriage does, indeed, provide “due provision for the sexual impulse: this is the point of

the counsel in 3-5" (Ibid, 76).

V. 3: "The husband must fulfill his dutiful vows to his wife, and also the wife likewise to her husband"

Marriage does, in fact, create responsibilities or obligations which do not exist outside the marriage union. Paul here mentions one of them.

The word translated "dutiful vows" (*opheilen*) refers to "debt; what is due (with specific reference to conjugal ["having to do with marriage"] rights)." It embraces "the mutual obligation of spouses deriving from the order of creation" (Hauck, 564); "spec. of *conjugal duty*" (Thayer, 469).

It is a mutual or reciprocal duty in the realm of God-designed sexual intercourse. The present tense verb "fulfil" (*apodidoto*) denotes the continual, on-going, "habitual duty" (Morris, 106) of the spouses in this regard. One spouse's duty is not superior to the other or at the expense of the other. It involves mutual interactions and cooperation. Within the boundary of marriage, this duty is for mutual satisfaction.

Again, Paul is not laying down "the *ground* of marriage, as though it were 'ordained for a remedy against sin, but gives a special reason why those should marry at Corinth who might otherwise have remained single" (Findlay, 823).

V. 4: "The wife does not have the right over her own body, but the husband does, and likewise also the husband does not have the right over his own body, but the wife does."

The word translated "right" (*exousiazei*) refers to "authority, jurisdiction." This explains why mutually oriented sexual intercourse is "a matter of obligation, viz. that neither the man nor the woman has authority or right over his own, but each over the other's body" (Gould, 58).

Sexual intercourse in marriage is not only for the mutual satisfaction of the spouses but also is "according to the rights of the other" (Findlay, 823). That is, "in wedlock separate ownership of the person ceases" (Robertson and Plummer, 134). After all, marital sexual intercourse is not aimed at "self-gratification, but the fulfillment of a duty which each owes to the other. [Paul thereby] raises the matter from the physical level to the moral" (Ibid.).

V. 5: "[So] you must stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, in order that you may devote yourselves to prayer and then you may be one again, in order that Satan may not tempt you because of your lacking self-control"

Suspension of this mutual duty rests solely "if both parties desired to take



part in some special religious service of devotion” (Moffatt, 76), such as prayer. Avoiding this mutually respectable refrain from this mutually-designed duty may bring about one or the other seeking sexual satisfaction outside the domain of marriage under the tempting allurements of Satan.

The word translated “lacking self-control” (*akrasian*) occurs in the NT only here and M t. 23:25. It means “*want of self-control, incontinence, intemperance*” (Thayer, 23). If this temporary deprivation of sexual intercourse is not one of “mutual consent” (Goudge, 54), “it simply begets a situation which gives temptation an easy chance” (Barclay, 60). After all, “marriage is not a capricious [“to change suddenly without reason”] union, but a holy bond” (Farrar, 224). Respect it or reap reprehensible results.

V. 6: “I am speaking these things by way of concession, not of command”

Paul now clarifies that his directions about sexual intercourse both within and without the marriage bond are not a command from him or anyone else.

The word “concession” (*suggnomen*) occurs here only in the NT. The word means “‘knowing together,’ understanding, agreement, and so concession” (Robertson, 125); “to agree with; by way of permission” (Thayer, 592); “to meet you half way” (BAG, 780).

In other words, “in view of the strong temptations to incontinence in human nature and in the existing social order, he admitted marriage to be legitimate for Christians who could not otherwise resist the seductions to illicit intercourse which were so insidious at Corinth” (Moffatt, 76-77).

Now, the sexual impulse within itself is not sinful. And in the marriage relationship, the sexual impulse finds appropriate expression and experience. However, “there must be no morbid evasion or restriction of the sexual impulse” (Ibid, 77), except for the temporary avoidance of it for devotional purposes, as noted above.

V. 7: “For I am wishing all men to be even as myself but each man has his own gift from God, one having one kind, and one having another”

Here Paul admits or confesses that continence or self-restraint or complete abstinence in sexual matters was a “gift” (*charisma*) which God had given him. That is, “God had given him the ability to live a single life without distracting sexual temptations. Perhaps Paul was preoccupied so completely with spiritual matters that he could enjoy a full life without sexual expression” (Howard, 63).

He also recognizes that not everyone has the type gift from God which he has. The words “one having one kind and one having another” denote that “there is a difference of gifts and everyone must be content with what God gave him. He that received the gift of continence should not boast as if he were more than somebody else. He that does not possess it should marry”

(Grosheide, 159).

He first mentions “gift” (*charismati*) in 1:7.

Paul elaborates more fully on spiritual gifts in ch. 12. See my own writing on spiritual gifts – *The Biblical Recipe for Church Functioning and Growth* – in my website: [archive.org/details/@mandm313](http://archive.org/details/@mandm313). It is free for online study or download.

This verse “offers the first hint of what verse 8 will make explicit” (Blomberg, 133).

V. 8: “And I am saying to the unmarried and to the widows: [it is] good for them if they may remain single as I myself”

Here Paul expands his position in v.1 by undergirding it with his own experience. So, those who are not married should not feel compelled to do so. Plus, they should not allow themselves to be pigeonholed or classified by anyone, as if they deserved disrespect, misunderstanding, censure, or disapproval.

Paul does not say that it is “better” but “good” (as in v. 1) to remain “unmarried” (*agamois*) – occurring only here and, 11, 32, 34 in the NT. It refers to “bachelors, widowers, and widows, but not unmarried girls, whose case is discussed later” (Robertson and Plummer, 138).

V. 9: “ But if they are not exercising self-control for themselves, they must marry, for it is better to marry than to be inflamed with sexual desire”

The word “if” (*ei*) begins a first class conditional clause which is regarded as being true – and could legitimately be translated “since.”

The word translated “exercising self-control for themselves” (*egkrateuontai*) is qualified by “not” (*ouk*) – and the middle voice - which means they themselves are not controlling their own sexual desires.

The word translated “inflamed” (*purousthai*) means “to be consumed with the fire of sexual desire” (Lang, 950). Phillips translates, “tortured by unsatisfied desire”; Weymouth translates, “the fever of passion.” MacArthur notes, “A person cannot live a happy life, much less serve the Lord, if he is continually burning with sexual desire – even if the desire never results in actual immorality. And in a society such as Corinth, or ours, in which immorality is so prevalent and accepted, it is especially difficult not to succumb to temptation” (163).

[This word is found elsewhere in the NT: 2 Cor. 11:29; Eph. 6:16; 2 Pt. 3:12; Rev.1:15; 3:18.]

In this case, therefore, Paul speaks imperatively: “they must marry.”

Of course, “the great value of celibacy lies in freedom from distraction, in the service of the Lord; [but] when celibacy brings worse distraction than marriage, its value is to a great extent gone” (Goudge, 55). That worse dis-

traction, of course, would be succumbing to the temptation of sexual immorality, as MacArthur also noted above.

V. 10: “And I am giving orders to those in the state of marriage – not I but the Lord – a wife is not to be separated by divorce from a husband”

The word translated “to those in the state of marriage” (*gegamekosin*) is in the perfect tense which denotes those still married. This, of course, is God’s design for those who are married: to remain married.

So, Paul qualifies his opening verb “I am giving orders” with the subsequent words: “not I but the Lord.” In other words, Paul is stating that his words are but an echo of the Lord’s own words and is thus “authoritative” (Edwards, 165): Mt. 5:32; 19:9; Mk. 10:11-12; Lk. 16:18.

Moffatt (78) suggests that there was a feminist group in the church which “claimed freedom to desert or divorce a husband, [so] Paul mentions the wife first.

Ordinarily, a woman could not initiate divorce from a husband except in certain cases: “impotence, denial of conjugal rights, unreasonable restriction of her freedom of movement, such as keeping her from going to funerals or wedding parties, loathsome ailments, or nasty occupations such as tanning” (Moore, 125).

Despite the cited cases by Jewish teachings, and the increasing recognition within the Roman Empire of a wife’s ability to initiate divorce, no such matters are here acknowledged for dissolving marriage in which one “Christian is married to another Christian” (Dean, 80).

V. 11: “– but if she may be separated by divorce, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to the husband – and a husband is not to send away a wife.”

But since reality does not always occur within the confines of the Lord’s teachings, Paul shifts from a first class condition in v. 9 to a third class condition (*ean*) which indicates a possibility of separation by divorce. In light of that possibility, there are only two options: remain single or be reconciled. Again, in verses 10-11, Paul is regulating affairs within the context of Christian marriages for both wife and husband.

In verses 12-16, he addresses marriages in which one is a Christian and one is not.

V. 12: “and to the rest I myself – not the Lord – am saying: if any brother has an unbelieving wife and she agrees to live with him, he must not send her away”

Since Jesus did not address questions or concerns about a marriage in

which one was Christian and the other was not, Paul, again, qualifies his sayings or teachings from his own authoritative perspective. That is, “he gives his own inspired judgment, the authoritative word of a divinely appointed apostle” (Berquist, 57).

It appears that this “brother” or Christian may have married his wife at the time he himself was not a Christian. If the non-Christian wife, however, agrees or is pleased to stay married to him, he must not divorce her. Robertson, however, says that some think the word “send away” (*aphieto*) may be understood “as separation from bed and board, not divorce” (127). Whatever the correct or intended meaning may be, “Paul regards unions entered into as pagans as being on a footing different from those entered into as Christians. Here everything depends on the attitude of the pagan partner” (Morris, 109-110).

V. 13: “and if a wife has an unbelieving husband and she agrees to live with him, she must not send away the husband”

The same principle entertained in v. 12 concerning a Christian husband who is married to a non-Christian is equally applied in the case of a Christian woman who is married to a non-Christian husband.

V. 14: “for the unbelieving husband has been sanctified in connection with the wife and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified in connection with the brother; otherwise your children are without a relationship to God, but now they are set apart to God”

To say that a non-Christian husband or wife “has been sanctified” (*hegiastai*) by being married to a Christian husband or wife does not mean that the other has been set apart into the same realm of holiness as their Christian spouse. However, it does mean that because of his or her being ‘one flesh’ with the other, both are “affiliated to the Christian community” (Vincent, 218). The Christian influence of one on the other is increased and sets their marriage apart from neither being Christian.

This verb is in the perfect tense and denotes an existing state of being. Paul is not pointing to the personal consecration of the one in behalf of the other but rather to their being “one” in the “marriage union so that there remains nothing in it contrary to Christian holiness” (Goudge, 56). Being married to a non-Christian does not invalidate the marriage.

Plus, “becoming a Christian [on the part of one spouse] is no ground for divorce” (Erdman, 69). So, this truth clearly indicates in this context that there is no sexual immorality involved when they have sexual intercourse, despite one being a Christian and the other not being one.

If this were not the case, then “your children” would be bastards or illegitimate offspring. So, the father or mother who is a Christian “cannot look on

children, given by God through marriage, as things unclean. Offspring are holy as bound up with the holy parent; and this principle of family solidarity holds *good* of the *conjugal* tie [involving sexual intercourse] no less than of the filial [son or daughter] derived therefrom”(Findlay, 827).

Therefore, the Christian parent exerts “a sanctifying influence with his [her] family” (Berquist, 57), “by means of their prayers, instructions, example” (Godet, 343). It is this, among other things, which sets the marriage apart from marriages in which neither spouse is a Christian.

V. 15: “But if the unbeliever leaves, you must let him leave; the brother or the sister is not bound by the marriage vows, for God calls us in the sphere of peace”

On the other hand, there is one exception noted in this verse. Due to the potential tension and conflicts with a non-Christian spouse over values, expectations, norms, and societal practices, the Christian’s allegiance and devotion to Christ may prove unbearable to the non-Christian spouse. So, if their departure from the marriage became desirable, “the Christian partner was not compelled to try to prevent the separation” (Blomberg, 135). The marriage vow has been terminated in this case.

The verb “called” (*kekleken*) is in the perfect tense which indicates an existing and permanent call without retraction or retreat. This call refers to “the day the unbelieving spouse entered upon the desertion and states that from that moment onward the believing spouse has not been held bound. From that day onward the fetters of the marriage tie have been broken and remain so, now and indefinitely” (Lenski, 294-295).

That is, divorce is permissible in this condition. God’s call is for one’s marriage to be one of “peace.”

Therefore, the believing spouse is free and “peace” occurs. God “does not desire enslavement in the marriage relation between the believer and the unbeliever” (Robertson, 128). When the non-Christian spouse leaves, “the result of this transition is peace” (Grosheide, 166).

V. 16: “For how do you know, O wife, if you shall save the husband? And how do you know, O husband, if you shall save the wife?”

How are these questions to be understood? Two main positions have been taken:

(1) Encouraging the non-Christian to stay in the marriage may likely lead to the conversion of the non-Christian is possible. But “why cling to him, or her, on so ill-founded a hope” (Findlay, 828)?

(2) As Morris (111) notes, for the Christian to encourage the non-Christian to stay in and “cling to a marriage which the heathen is determined to end would lead to nothing but frustration and tension” (Morris, 111) rather than

“peace.”

In light of v. 15 and the permission to let the non-Christian partner leave, the second position seems more likely to be Paul’s meaning. In light of the sphere of “peace” which characterizes God’s calling, “enslavement in the marriage relation between the believer and the unbeliever is contrary to the spirit and intent of this calling” (Vincent, 219) which is characterized by “peace.”

V. 17: “Nevertheless as the Lord permanently assigns each one [a spiritual gift – 1:7; v. 7], as God permanently calls each one, he must live in this manner. And this is what I am teaching in all the churches”

The word translated “permanently assigns” (*memeriken*) is in the perfect tense and denotes an existing state or condition of being a recipient of some spiritual gift, here in relation to marriage.

The word translated “permanently calls” (*kekleken*) is also in the perfect tense with the same force as “assigns.”

In other words, in relationship to marriage, and all the perspectives Paul has provided in the earlier verses, each Christian is to “carry on as God has called him, with that which the Lord has endowed him” (Berquist, 58).

“Christ allotted his portion [of spiritual gifts] to each Christian, God hath called each man [accordingly]: [and] that lot and that call are to guide his life” (Farrar, 226).

The correlation between God’s calling to salvation and the bestowment of certain gifts is to be displayed practically in one’s manner of living.

Furthermore, this “general principle which determines these questions about marriage” (Robertson and Plummer, 144) is what Paul consistently teaches in all churches, despite any accusations or implications otherwise by others. He will now, in ver. 18-24, apply this general principle to two other concrete or specific situations (circumcision and slavery).

V. 18: “Has anyone been called who is circumcised? He must not remove the marks of circumcision. Has anyone been called in connection with no circumcision? He must not become circumcised.”

Paul’s point is straightforward enough: a natural Jew and a natural Gentile must remain as they are. There must be no efforts to alter one’s natural human nature or offspring. Although circumcision played an identification role in the old covenant, the new covenant does not demand this sign. Both Jew and Gentile stand on equal footing before God.

V. 19: “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but obedience [to] commandments of God”

A Christian is not marked by what he does with the foreskin of his penis but what he does with the Father's commands about his pathways in life.

"The important thing for him who is called is not to seek to be or to become what he is not, but to *keep the commandments of God* – the moral laws, which [are] valid for everybody" (Grosheide, 169). That is, how one lives is what makes a difference for both Jew and Gentile.

V. 20: "Each person must remain in the calling in which he was called."

The verb translated "must remain" (*meneto*) is an imperative and yields no other option – no time for debate, no room for discussion. This statement simply reenforces what was just declared in v. 19.

The word "calling" (*klesai*) first occurred in 1:26 and refers to the condition or state of being you were in and should remain in – Jew or Gentile.

The verb "called" (*eklethe*) "always signifies the call of God into His kingdom through conversion" (Vincent, 219). The word "never means 'occupation,' or 'business' but 'the call of the gospel'" (Edwards, 181).

V. 21: "Have you been called [while] a slave? Let it be of no concern to you. But if you are also able to become free, you must make the most of the opportunity to get free"

If the calling of God to conversion took place while a person was a slave, it was not to be an anxiety arousing matter or one which seemed to pose contradictory claims about becoming a Christian. After all, slavery "was usually a fixed condition and a slave could be a good servant of Christ even with heathen masters" (Robertson, 130).

However, if some situation arose in which being set from slavery occurred, "the apostle tells him to use it" (Gould, 63).

V. 22: "For the slave who has been called in the Lord is a freedman belonging to the Lord; in the same way, the freedman who has been called is a slave of Christ"

To be "called in the Lord emphasizes the presence of that wonderful Being, the divine Lord" (Morris, 114).

Even though a converted slave may remain a slave "in his secular condition, in his spiritual condition he has been set free: he is a called holy one (1:2). . . [but he is still a slave] of Christ [and] he is bound to obey his new spiritual Master and Lord" (Robertson and Plummer, 148).

The external circumstances in which one may live are important, but not as important as the living of one's life in the service of the Supreme One. In end it will be fully comprehended and seen that there is not and was not anything which compared with this reality.

V. 23: “You have been bought with a valuable price; do not become slaves of men”

This verse is an echo of 6:20 where the exact two words (“valuable price”) first occurred in this letter. I copy:

The word “bought” (*hegorasthete*) indicates that the purchase price for their bodies has been made. Moule (39) prefers “*you were bought for a price*” (cf. vii. 23). Even though “it is not said who has bought them, or from whom they are bought, or at what cost” (Buchsel, 125), it surely is consistent with what Peter identified in 1 Pt. 1:19: “the blood of Christ,” and what Jesus stated in Mt. 20:28: “to give His life a ransom for many.”

So, it is here termed “a valuable price” (*times*). Indeed, “the effect of Christ’s death for us is that we are redeemed from slavery and prison, and the right of our possession is with Christ” (Farrar, 195).

Findlay’s words (831) are sufficient: “Let no human influence divert you from service to God, or infringe on the devotion due to your Redeemer. Public opinion and the social pressure of heathenism were too likely to enslave the Corinthians.”

V. 24: “Fellow believers, each one must remain with God in what state he [was] when called”

The word “fellow believers, brothers” (*adelphoi*) denotes not only the sonship of God but also the social connections with others in the family of God. It is most important to note, as Berquist (60) points out, that Paul

does not discourage ambition or aspiration – the desire to better one’s lot or to achieve worthy goals in this life. He does emphasize the importance and the possibility of living the Christian life, and living it fully, whatever one’s circumstances and conditions may be. ‘Wherever God has found you, called you, or placed you, there abide in him, says Paul. ‘He will lead you on!’

Indeed, the words “with God” (*para theo*) underscore a most significant truth: “a man who is redeemed is able to live in whatever state he was in when he was called as a Christian because he now lives in Christ and *with* God. The slavery men impose cannot undo the freedom God gives” (Brown, 333). After all, “even a slave can have God at his side by remaining at God’s side” (Robertson, 131).

V. 25: “Now concerning unmarried girls I do not have a command from the Lord, but I am giving an opinion [deemed] to be trustworthy as one who received mercy from the Lord”



Paul acknowledges that he does not have any specific command from Jesus on the subject of unmarried girls/virgins. However, his “opinion” (*gnome*) or “counsel” (Bultmann, 717) is “trustworthy” (*pistos*). That is, it is “worthy of trust, having the quality of fidelity, reliability, certainty” (Bultmann, 175-176).

This trustworthiness of his opinion or judgment is anchored in “his having received mercy from the Lord – a reason for trusting his judgment so he may be relied upon as a truly responsible adviser” (Moffatt, 91).

Robertson (131) calls it, “a deliberately formed decision from knowledge (2 Cor. 8:10), not a mere passing fancy.”

V. 26: “I am thinking then this [opinion] to be good because of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is”

The word “good” (*kalon*) means “proper, fitting, better, honorable, honest, right.”

The word “present” (*enestosan*) indicates what is “impending or imminent.” It qualifies the word “distress” (*anagken*) which may refer to the ordinary troubles in most any marriage, or the afflictions within the body which are also quite common. Edwards (190; cp. Robertson, 132), however, calls it “the distress that would precede the second coming of Christ.” Bengel (204) notes its historical limitation to “the famine in the time of Claudius, Acts xi. 28. It was very long and severe, especially in Greece. Therefore this advice of Paul was, partly at last, accommodated to the time.” So, there is lack of consensus about the precise meaning of this term.

Goudge (60) likely gives this most widely needed – and hopefully accepted – perspective: “To the true Christian there is ever much to distress in the outlook. Thus at few periods of Church history would the Apostle’s advice be likely to differ from that given here.”

Paul, therefore, advocates remaining single as the best way to serve God in light of all the darkness and distress which accompanies the Christian way.

V. 27: “Are you in a marriage bond with a wife? You must not be seeking release; Having been released from a wife, you must not be seeking a wife.”

The word “release” (*lusin*) occurs here only in the NT. It means “separation, divorce.” Moulton and Milligan (382) note that while the term refers to the “‘loosing’ of the marriage tie, [it] is common [also] with reference to the ‘discharge’ of bonds or debts” outside of the NT usage.

Paul seems to have regarded this verse as an insertion “to guard against misunderstanding of the preceding *gnome* [“opinion” in v. 25] of the Apostle” (Alford, 530).

V. 28: “But if you may be married, you have not sinned, and if a young girl

may marry, she has not sinned; but such ones shall have trouble in the flesh, and I myself am seeking to keep you from doing so”

Since Paul’s “opinion” is in view, “if one acts differently, he will not sin” (Godet, 373). But his advice is designed to spare them of the troubles which typically occur in some marriages.

Bruce (75) summarizes as follows: “A man who has no wife or children liable to suffer because of his refusal to compromise or deny his faith in face of persecution is in a stronger position than one who must consider what effect his stand will have on his dependants.” So, Paul is most pragmatic here.

V. 29: “And I am saying this, fellow believers, [that] the remaining time is cut short in order that those who have wives may be as though not having one”

The word “saying” (*phemi*) indicates that Paul is reminding them of a consideration which they may have forgotten: “The time open to us is contracted – i.e., the time which gives us opportunity for doing what Christians have to do” (Parry, 120). Paul is not discounting the importance of marriage or advocating abandoning one’s spouse. However, in light of the urgency of the hour, as he reckoned it, Calvin’s words (257) are always pertinent: “the mind of a Christian ought not to be taken up with earthly things or to repose in them [even in our earthly marriages]; for we ought to live as if we were every moment about to depart from this life.” It is a matter of priorities in proper perspective!

V. 30: “And those who are weeping as not weeping and those who are rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those who are buying as not possessing”

Life consists of a series of encounters with people, places, and things which trigger weeping, rejoicing, and buying. Paul is not downcrying or seeking to regard these matters as insignificant or unnecessary. He is, however, advocating their rightful place for people who are destined to live eternally in another place. So, the things of this world must constantly be evaluated as to their impact on those headed ultimately out of this world.

In other words, “the necessity and trials of the time were to be regarded as modifying all the ordinary conditions and relations of life” (Ellicott, 131). Perhaps, Godet (377-378) captures the meaning as well as anyone:

Here is depicted the spiritual detachment in its application to the various situations of life. As nothing in this world has more than a waiting character, the afflicted believer will not be swayed by his pain; he will say to himself: It is no more worth the trouble! The man who is visited by joy will not be intoxicated by it; he will say to himself: It is but for a

moment. He who buys, will not seize and hold the object he has got too keenly (*katechein, to hold firmly*); for he will look upon himself as always ready to give it up. It is not meant that the believer will not rejoice or be afflicted or care for what he has.

Edwards (195) notes that Paul's teaching here was that

emotion was not to be eradicated or weakened, but that it ought to be regulated and harmonized. The nearness and uncertainty of the time of Christ's coming is the regulative element in the Christian life. It checks excessive joy, tempers the anguish of sorrow, and determines the right mean in the use of earthly goods. But it also deepens joy and sorrow, and unites both in one joy of sadness, sadness of joy. . . . No man rejoices, no man sorrows, as the Christian who lives in expectation of Christ. Excess is prevented, not by the diminution of joy or sorrow, but by the harmony of both.

V. 31: "And those who are using the world as not using to the fullest extent; for the present form of this world is passing away"

To speak of using the world, but not using it to its fullest extent, encompasses all aspects of worldly existence: marriage, children, property, political endeavors, social support systems, financial or commercial enterprises, the arts and sciences, etc. Again, Godet (378) frames the thrust of this passage in a coherent way: "He who uses the world, in these different domains, while keeping his eye constantly fixed on the future, ought to preserve the same inward calm as one might who had broken with the whole train of earthly affairs."

The "form" (*schema* – occurring in the NT only here and Phil.2:7) of this world refers here to "the outward appearance, all that can be apprehended by the senses. This may change, and does change, season by season" (Robertson and Plummer, 156). It means "the whole shaping of affairs which characterises the present is passing away" (Parry, 120).

Gould (66) ties this meaningfulness together more contextually: "The apostle exhorts them as those living in a period of such changes, when the troubles of the time preceding the coming of the Lord were overshadowing them, and that coming itself with its transformations in the conditions and relations of things was near, not to be dependent on these changing things for their life."

Grosheide (178) captures its essence this way: "To pass away means that the world is under a judgment of transitoriness, it is under a curse. . . . the passing away of this present world must be a continuous warning not to set their heart

upon this earth.”

V. 32: “And I am wanting you to be free from worries. The unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord”

Paul’s closing words in v. 28 about seeking to spare his readers from the troubles in this life are not resumed with wanting to make them free from worries. He does this by stressing his “preference for celibacy. He longs to see men give over to the service of God with no distraction” (Morris, 118). The word “free from worries” (*amerimnous*) means “all anxiety for merely temporal interests must be discarded that the mind may be free for the eternal interests” (Parry, 120).

The unmarried man concentrates exclusively on his service to the Lord, rather than varied or intermittent concentration on the Lord and his wife and children, as he notes in v. 33.

V. 33: “But the one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please the wife”

The married man must discharge his duties or obligations in regard to family interests. This, in itself, is not a negative. It is simply the nature of the case. However, it does create a division of purpose: to please the Lord and to please his wife. Indeed, the word “concerned about” (*merimna*) means that he “is distracted in his interests: his allegiance and aims are divided” (Parry, 120). So, Paul is not degrading marriage. He is merely pointing out the practical difficulties which may hinder or interfere with a man’s complete consecration to Christ.

V. 34: “and he is in a state of divided interest. And the unmarried woman or the virgin girl [are] concerned about the things of the Lord in order that she may be set apart [for the Lord] in both body and spirit; but the one having been married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please the husband”

The same principle about the married man is now applied to the married woman. It is simply a matter of fact that marriage partners must focus on meeting the needs of each other.

This is not to say “that the married life cannot be so consecrated but that it introduces other cares” (Parry, 120).

However, the consecration of unmarried Christians will be “unmodified by any earthly commitment” (Morris, 119).

V. 35: “And I am saying this for your own benefit, not in order that you may be thrown off the course [of marital consideration] but toward what is good

and without distraction about devotion to the Lord”

When Christian commitment or absolute devotion to the Lord is one’s primary purpose in life, remaining single is the primary way to deliver such devotion. The “benefit” (*sumphoron*) is that “there need be no intermission in the service offered to the Lord by the unmarried, no *distraction* of any sort” (Morris, 120). So, those who limit the intrusion of family life and worldly concerns in connection with Christian service may thereby be “lessening the demands of selfishness and increasing the opportunities of benevolent action [to] give greater scope to Christian living. And it is in this view that the apostle gives his qualified commendation of celibacy” (Gould, 67).

However, Paul is not talking about “restriction” or “seeking to throw people off” (*brochon* – here only in the NT) the course of marriage if that is God’s gift to them. The word actually means “‘to throw a noose over you’ so as to get you into my power” (Parry, 120). He is, however, placing before them considerations which may be overlooked.

V. 36: “Now if anyone thinks himself to be behaving improperly toward his single girl, if she may be having strong passions for men and it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he is not sinning, they must marry”

The word translated “behaving improperly” (*aschemonein* – cp. 13:5) creates caution. The improper behavior or “unseemliness lies, not in the fact that he is compelling his daughter to become an old maid, but in the fact that his refusal to have his daughter married would subject her to the danger of seduction” (Lensk, 326).

Indeed, it is “used of some conduct towards a daughter which may bring discredit on the father: the rest of the verse shows that the conduct is the refusal to promote her marriage” (Parry, 121).

As one who is sexually mature, she is experiencing the influx of sexual hormones and the corollary increase of sexual tensions and desires and is “having strong passions for men” (*huperakmos* – here only in the NT). The father must not deny or prohibit his daughter from marriage. The subjective convictions of the father and the objective sexual condition of his daughter must be properly balanced. The father is not sinning in this matter, but he may be doing so if he continues creating resistance to marriage and the consequential confusion and conflicts in his daughter.

V. 37: “But the one who stands steadfast in his heart, not having constraint, but is having authority over his own will and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin girl, he shall do well”

The course of action for the father hinges on four factors: (1) his own firm resolution; (2) the daughter does not have sexual urges; or “is not under any

earlier contract for the marriage of his daughter” (Parry, 122); (3) the father is not simply stubborn about the matter; (4) the father’s final decision in his own heart to guard or protect his daughter.

“When the virgin daughter does not wish to marry and the father agrees with her, *he shall do well (kalos poiesei)*” (Robertson, 135-136). This means that “the father, who, from high motives, remained unshaken in the resolve to

dedicate his daughter to the virgin life, doeth well” (Farrar, 229).

V. 38: “And so both the one who gives his own virgin girl in marriage is doing well and the one who does not give his virgin girl in marriage is doing better”

The father who gives his daughter in marriage ‘does well’ because marriage is an honourable feature in this life.

The father who does not give his daughter in marriage ‘does better’ – “not *morally*, because if one course be *morally* better than another, we are bound to take it; but ‘better’ with reference to expediency in ‘the urgent necessity’ which rested on the Christian world in that day” (Farrar, 229).

V. 39: “A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband may have fallen sleep, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord”

The word “have fallen asleep” (*koimethe*) is a euphemism for physical death. The term occurs again in: 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51.

A widow is “free to be married” again. However, “even if the Apostle permits second marriage, he tolerates them because of the weakness of the flesh” (Edwards, 204).

“Only in the Lord” means that a second marriage for a Christian widow must be a Christian marriage.

V. 40: “But she is better off if she may remain as she is, according to my opinion; and I think also that I have the Spirit of God [in this regard]”

Paul’s “opinion” (*gnomen* – cp. 1:10; 7::25), again, is that it is better if a widow does not remarry. The word “better” (*makariotera*) is related to the word “blessed” (*makarios*) in the Sermon on the Mount. It is in the superlative and “denotes the blessedness of entire consecration to the work of the Lord.” However, there is “no question of a superior holiness in this world, or a more glorious position in the next” (Godet, 396) if she remains unmarried.

Nevertheless, “he insists that he has ‘the spirit of God’ (*pneuma theou*) in the expression of his inspired judgment on this difficult, complicated,

tangled problem of marriage. But he has discharged his duty and leaves each one to decide for himself” (Robertson, 136).

B. Sacrificial Meats (8:1-11:1)

This section touches on meats used for sacrificial purposes in the heathen temples and whether or not a Christian should partake thereof. After all, this meat was commonly sold in the market places for everyday food. In a former but unknown letter from the church to Paul (7:1), this was one of the questions which had been raised. Paul’s response to this question is supplied in this chapter.

This overview of this part of the letter provides valuable perspectives on its content: Vs. 1-3: The insufficiency of knowledge alone in resolving issues which pose problems within the church. Knowledge must be accompanied by love for maximum meaningfulness in dealing with difficulties; Vs. 4-6: That which decides moral challenges in eating meat formerly sacrificed to idols in pagan meetings hinges, partly at least, on the recognition that there is truly only one God; V. 7: It is wrong to eat such meat if those who do so still retain the reality of idols; V. 8: Eating or not eating does not make a person better or worse; Vs. 9-11: The Christian who is strong and not bothered over the reality of idols must not eat such meat and thereby offend a fellow Christian who is weaker over such reality; Vs. 12-13: To sin against a fellow Christian is to sin against Christ. Abstinence is, therefore, the best alternative.

1. Principles Raised (8:1-13)

V. 1: “Now in regard to some of the things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. [However] knowledge creates conceit, but love creates Christian character [and acts more wisely]”

Now to address one of the questions (7:1) raised by the Corinthians in a previous letter he received from them: i.e., to eat or not to eat meat which had been sacrificed to idols in pagan meetings.

The word translated “sacrificed to idols” (*eidolothuton*) appears here for the first time in this letter. It appears again in verses 4, 7 10; and 10:19, 28. [It occurs elsewhere in the NT: Acts 15:29; 21:25; Rev. 2:14, 20.]

Knowledge, of course, is necessary to answer questions in any field of interest. Knowledge is the accumulation of information about some person, place, thing, event, or subject; an awareness or understanding of something or someone.

In this context, Paul was referring to their possession of knowledge about eating meat which had been sacrificed to idols. He acknowledges they “had studied the question and were convinced that they

understood the problem except for a few minor details” (Grosheide, 189).

Nevertheless, their quest for resolving the issue was based primarily, if not exclusively, on the mere possession of knowledge. They thought such knowledge would result in a building up of one another into a harmonious conclusion about the matter. However, it actually led to the very opposite. They became puffed up with conceit or arrogance so that those who were convinced of the unreality of idols ate the idol meat without any regard for the effect it had on those who were not yet quite so convinced.

This disregard of the impact on others about eating the meat was, in reality, a violation of another more important consideration: “love” (*agape*) or the Godly kind of love which prioritizes the impact of one’s behaviors on others. Paul sensed the absence of this kind of love and, therefore, presents the antithetical nature of knowledge alone versus knowledge accompanied with and motivated by love. The latter creates Christian character, while the former creates conceit – a seemingly common problem in their church (4:6).

This is the second appearance of the word “love” (*agape* – 4:21) and will be elaborated upon in 13:1, 2, 3, 4 (three), 8, and 13 (twice).

V. 2: “When someone seems to know something, he has not yet known as he ought to know”

The accumulation of knowledge which one regards as full or complete may actually only be partial or limited. This was the case in the church at Corinth, as indicated by the word “seems” (*dokei*) together with the word “to know” (*egnokenai*) in the perfect tense which indicates a complete state of possession.

That their state of possession was not, in reality, complete or full is indicated by the following words: “he has not yet known as he ought to know.” That is, “the knowledge which the Corinthians thought they possessed is an imaginary knowledge” (Grosheide, 190). Morris (125) quotes Kay in a related way: “Knowledge is proud that it has learnt so much. Wisdom [in concert with love] is humble that it knows no more.” By deflating their balloon of conceit or arrogance, Paul wants them “to know” that “he who thinks he knows actually has no knowledge at all but only that the way he knows is not the right one. He does not know the way God requires, for he does not have love.” (Grosheide, 190), as v. 3 clarifies.

V. 3: “But when someone may love God, he is known by Him”

So, instead of engaging in an extended discourse on all the elements



or ingredients within true knowledge, Paul boils it down to its very essence and is without imagination. To know God is to love God and to love God is to know God and be known by Him. Knowledge by itself is always limited, incomplete, and imperfect. But knowledge mingled with God's kind of love is "that intimate knowledge which recognizes them as friends" (Gould, 71).

This knowledge of loving God and being known by Him is the kind of love and knowledge which motivates people to love others and take into consideration what is best for them. "The two go together and it is Paul's purpose to inform the Corinthians of the great significance of God's love which surpasses all earthly knowledge" (Grosheide, 191). This is what sets the stage for proper resolution of the meat-eating case at hand which he continues to address. After all, "no one is acquainted with God who does not love him (1 John 4:8)" (Robertson, 138).

The principle is that God seals the deal with those who love Him.

V. 4: "Now in regard to the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol in this world [is] nothing and that there is but One God"

He here resumes what he began in v. 1. In the world of both the godly and the ungodly, an idol is "nothing" (*ouden*). This is the first occurrence of the word "idol" (*eidolon*) in this letter. It occurs again in v. 7; 10:19, 12:2. [It appears elsewhere in the NT: Acts 7:41; 15:20; Rom. 2:2; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Thes. 1:9; 1 Jn. 5:21; Rev. 9:20.] It refers to any object, person, place, or thing which surpasses the priority of God in one's life.

However, there were then and continue to be now idols and images of pagan gods. So, to say that there were and are no idols or images is contrary to facts or reality.

The word "nothing" (*ouden*) does not mean that they do not exist but that there is nothing of spiritual value and benefits attached to them. Pagans, however, maintained that not only did the idols benefit them during the sacrificial ceremonies but also that the very fumes from their burning made them one with the idols.

Some of the strong ones in the church maintained that since there is no real spiritual significance about the idols, their superior knowledge immunized them from such superstitious folly and they would go ahead and eat the meat. After all, "there is but One God." And since He is the God Who made the world, the case is closed

V. 5: "For even if there are those who are called gods whether in heaven or upon the earth, like there are many gods and many lords"

Here, Paul denies that these beings are real “gods” by using the word “called” (*legomenoi*). That is, they are “called what they are not” (Edwards, 215). They have a false reputation.

So, Paul is contrasting polytheism with monotheism as another way to explode the spiritually meaningful existence and nature of these “gods and lords.” They are “nothing to Christians as objects of worship, or claimants for allegiance” (Goudge, 71).

V. 6: “But to us [there is] one God, the Father, from Whom [are] all things and we in Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ through Whom [are] all things and we through Him”

Paul’s stance is without hesitation or equivocation. The God Who is the Creator, Sustainer, and the One Who will be the Consummator of it all, is the only true God. Paul’s words must be so understood since it was his purpose “to distinguish between God the Father, who is the ultimate source of creation, and Christ, the Lord, **through whom** this activity took place” (Craig, 93).

Plus, Paul insists that “those who have been liberated by faith through the grace of Jesus Christ into a great new experience of life’s fullness are in no bondage to idols” (Short, 93).

This knowledge, however, must not be a platform of pride from which to denounce the weaker ones who are still struggling with the case. “The true effect of such knowledge is revealed by the character of those who possess it. Weaker brethren, for whom Christ also died, are to be dealt with in a spirit of love” (Ibid., 94).

V. 7: “But this knowledge is not in all and some by being used to idols until now are eating meat offered to idols, and their conscience being weak is being defiled”

This knowledge about the meaninglessness of the idols and the meat sacrificed to them was hard to swallow for some. After all, some of them, prior to their conversion, had a long history of regarding such sacrificial offerings as real. They, therefore, thought “that it was sinful to eat of meat thus offered” (Vincent, 227). They still sensed that the idols and meat held some value “or at least as if the offering to an idol were polluted thereby” (Bengel, 208).

Indeed, “knowledge breaks down as a guide with the weak or unenlightened conscience” (Robertson, 139).

The word “being defiled” (*molunetai*) means “to make unclean” – and only occurs elsewhere in the NT: Rev. 3:4; 14:4). Their thinking was “it is defiled, not by the partaking of polluted food, for food cannot

pollute, but by the doing of something which the unenlightened conscience does not allow” (Robertson and Plummer, 169).

Indeed, “the consciousness of sharing in idol-worship is defiling to the spirit of a Christian; to taste knowingly, under any circumstances, thus affects converts from heathenism who have no the full faith that the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof” (Findlay, 842).

V. 8: “But food will not bring us closer to God; indeed, if we may not eat we are not worse off, nor if we do eat are we better off”

Paul states that the reason why there should be loving accommodation to the weaker Christians is because there is no gain or benefit either way. Food will not generate condemnation or commendation from God. It will neither please nor displease Go to eat or not eat.

With these words, Paul bursts the bubble of either pride of knowledge or pride of prejudice. The guiding principle of divine love for others must be followed wholeheartedly.

V. 9: “Just be cautious lest this right of yours become an offence for the weak”

Love for others must override one’s own rights in light of whatever degree of knowledge one possesses. One must never flaunt his knowledge in the face of those with less understanding, or seldom use his privileges if it undermines those with less.

As Farrar (265) warns: “To lead any one to do that which he thinks to be wrong is to place a stone of stumbling in his way, even if we do not think the act to be wrong.” Teaching others to live in ways which contradict their consciences is to teach in ways that are devoid of love.

V. 10: “For if someone who has proper knowledge [that sacrificial meat is ordinary meat] may see you dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience being weak be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?”

When someone with knowledge that there is no contamination involved in eating such meat “attends a banquet *in an idol’s temple*, he may influence a weak Christian to do the same. Later, after he reflects upon what he has done, *this weak man* may have a great sense of guilt and even a shattering of his faith” (Brown, 339). This evil effect will be avoided if divine love is guiding the thoughts and pathways of the stronger Christian..

V. 11: “For the one who is weak is being destroyed through your knowledge, the brother for whom Christ died.”

Not only does such behavior on the part of the strong have the potential of evil consequences but also may actually “destroy” (*apethanen*) a fellow believer. So, sacrificial divine love must direct the stronger Christian. As Robertson (141) notes, “ruin follows in the wake of such daredevil knowledge” which operates outside the boundary of divine love. They are “destroyed” “in relation to themselves, and to Christ, and the defeat of Christ’s work” (Gould, 74) in their behalf. Paul will use the word “brother” in v. 12 and twice in v. 13 to stress the value of those for whom “the costliness of mankind’s redemption” (Brown, 340) transpired.

V. 12: “And so by sinning against the fellow Christians and wounding their weak consciences, you are sinning against Christ”

The conclusion of the matter is stated in shocking terms. The word “wounding” (*tuptontes* – “a slap in the face”) of the weak consciences of a fellow Christian is equal to striking and beating a person – it is synonymous with “sinning” (*hamartanete*) against not only the fellow Christian but also Christ Himself.

V. 13: “Therefore, if eating sacrificial meat offends my fellow Christian, I will never ever eat meat again, in order that I may not offend my fellow Christian”

Paul himself, therefore, not only advocates sacrificial love to be practiced by others for others, but also adopts such sacrificial love for himself and his response to fellow believers. He is as emphatic as he could be. Like Paul, those who are strong in knowledge must also be strong in love. “Knowledge alone is nothing, knowledge with love is everything” (Lenski, 349).

After all, “love is always an exercise in selfless concern for the neighbor” (Brown, 340). It is the highest principle by which Christian pathways are to be measured – and followed. Anything else is everything else – but Christianity!

## 2. Personal Example (9:1-27)

This section touches on other variables which impact Christian freedom and the surrender of such freedom out of consideration for others. Paul himself illustrates this principle when it comes to his privileges as an

apostle, his support as an apostle, his discipline and self-denial as an apostle, the forfeiture of rights as an apostle, and the rewards which accompany those who do not abandon the Christian contest.

This overview of this part of the letter provides valuable perspectives on its content: Vs. 1-3: Paul's threefold qualifications to be an apostle; V. 4-6: Paul's defense before his adversaries; Vs. 7-15: Paul's justification for material support which he, nevertheless, declines; Vs. 16-18: Paul's preaching without pay; Vs. 19-23: Paul's accommodations to further the gospel; Vs. 24-27: Paul's discipline in the midst of conflict with evil forces.

V. 1: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?"

As a Christian, he is "free" from the ceremonialism of the OT covenant, he has the right to eat what he likes. Yet, for the sake of others (8:13) as a manifestation of Godly love (8:1), and refusal to sin against a fellow Christian and even Christ Himself (8:12-13), Paul lays aside this right. As an "apostle," his right to receive financial support from churches is also laid aside.

As proof of his apostleship, He has "seen Jesus our Lord," an obvious reference to his conversion to and commission from Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Another proof of his apostleship is the Corinthian Christians themselves. The effectiveness of his work in Corinth manifests the reality of the presence of Christ working in him to bring about their conversion to Christ. "The living presence of Christ" (Beet, 144) was the root behind the fruit.

V. 2: "Since to others I am not an apostle, I most emphatically am to you; for you are my evidence of apostleship in [the] Lord"

While there were some who did not acknowledge his apostleship, those in Corinth could not deny or refute that he was an apostle. His words, "I most emphatically am to you" reveals his unswerving assurance and confidence that he knew they "cannot deny it" (Bengel, 210). He does not say he was *to others* or *in the eyes of others* but "to you" or *in your eyes*. He uses the "you" again in stressing that they themselves stand as unmistakable "evidence" (*sphragis*) of his apostleship. The word *sphragis* may be translated "seal, mark, imprint, proof." It first appears in the NT in Rom. 4:11; then 2 Tim. 2:19; Rev. 5:1, 2, 5, 9; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 7:2; 8:1; 9:4.

As Fitzner (949) confirms, "the Corinthians are the seals of Paul's apostolate. As a seal confirms that someone is the holder of an office, so the actuality of the Corinthian Church as a church founded by and belong-

ing to him serves as his seal and validation.”

The significance of Paul’s “in [the] Lord” stresses that he is not boasting in himself or the role in played in the founding of the church. Whatever gracious guidance in the founding of the church occurred was guidance in the sphere of or in connection with his own connection to the Lord.

This “seal” came from the hand of the Lord and the church, therefore, “was a shining evidence of Paul’s commission” (Findlay, 846).

V. 3: “My defense to those who are investigating me is this:

It is certainly true that some in Corinth may have been challenging his right to eat and drink as he thought best, and for him to receive financial support from them. In fact, the word “investigating” (*anakinousin*) is a present tense verb which “suggests that Paul’s apostleship was frequently called in question” (Beet, 145).

So, his “defense” (*apologia*) to such investigators “with sharp eyes to find faults . . . under the critic’s eye glass” (Robertson, 142) is “that he certainly has all these rights and is free to insist on them if he chooses, but that he exercises his freedom by not insisting on them” (Bruce, 83). The word “defense” “signifies a legal defence against a charge” (Morris, 132). It was Paul’s “*self-exculpation*” (Findlay, 846) or freedom from blame; a proving innocent; vindication or proof of innocence.

The word “this” encompasses verses 1-3 in an exclamatory manner!

V. 4: “Do we not have a right to eat and to drink?”

Does the “we” in vs. 4-5 indicate only him and Barnabas (v. 6), or all the other apostles?

Apparently, Paul is saying that all the apostles have the right to be supported with food and drink by the churches they founded and serve. But Paul did not make use of this right.

V. 5: “Do we not have [the] right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?”

The apostles had the right to marry and seemingly all did. Paul, however, did not make use of this right. So, the Corinthians most emphatically cannot exclude Paul from this right in light of it occurring with the rest of the apostles.

As the leader of the apostles, Cephas is singled out as the notable example or “the most eminent instance” (Findlay, 847) of the married ones. Cephas is the Aramaic name of the equivalent Greek name Peter.

V. 6: “Or do only I and Barnabas not have [the] right to refrain from

working?”

Acts 13:2 and Gal. 2:9 seemingly support the fact that Barnabas was also an apostle. [Barnabas is mentioned: Acts 4:36; 9:27; 11:22, 25, 30; 12:25; 13:1, 2, 7, 43, 46, 50; 14:12, 14, 20; 15:2, (twice), 14, 20; 15:2 (twice), 12, 22, 25, 35, 36, 37, 39; Gal. 2:1, 9, 13; Col. 4:10] Barnabas, of course, was Paul’s earliest companion in his missionary endeavors and one who owned property (Acts 4:37; 13:2). He, with Paul, “shared the resolve to labour at a trade rather than to be maintained by his converts” (Beet, 145). They were “voluntarily independent” (Robertson, (143) of the support of others by supporting themselves. “Even when he was most in need he would never receive assistance from any Church except that of Philippi, where he had at least one wealthy convert, and where he was beloved with a peculiar warmth of affection” (Farrar, 287).

In verses 7-14, Paul sets forth six justifications as to the rights of a minister to be supported by his congregation: “1. From the ordinary laws of human justice (ver. 7). 2. By analogy from the Law of Moses (vers. 8-10). 3. From the obligations of common gratitude (ver. 11). 4. From the concession of the right to others who had inferior claims (ver. 12). 5. From the Jewish provision for the maintenance of priests (ver. 13). 6. By the rule laid down by Christ himself (ver. 14)” (Ibid).

V. 7: “Who serves as a soldier [at] his own expense at any time? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who shepherds a flock and does not consume the milk of the flock?”

The ordinary laws of human justice are seen in three examples: (1) the ordinary soldier receives food and money as part of his provisions as a soldier; (2) the one who plants a garden eats from it; (3) the one who shepherds a flock benefits from the milk which the flock produces. In fact, “a share of the milk was part of the shepherd’s pay” (Gould, 77).

As illustrated by these three examples, the ordinary rule of thumb is that people do not work without pay. Even so, “the minister of the gospel is beautifully compared with the soldier, vine-dresser, shepherd” (Bengel, 211). “He goes forth to contend with the world, to plant churches, and to exercise pastoral care over them” (Vincent, 229-230). These three parts of the work of ministers are sensibly sufficient to burst the bubble of any insensible arguments against them. Nevertheless, Paul’s forfeiture of this right is designed for protection against false accusations of ulterior motives.

V. 8: “I am not speaking these things in accordance with human ideas but doesn’t the law say these things?”

By way of analogy from the law of Moses, vers. 8-10 further explode unjustifiable attacks against the rights of a minister to be supported by his congregation.

Paul clarifies that these illustrations he is using are neither based upon nor derived from mere human wisdom. For he will now show that the same truths are found in the authoritative OT.

V. 9: “For it stands written in the law of Moses, **You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing**. The ox is not of concern to God.”

One specific statement in the OT, for example, is found in Deut. 25:4. The ox is not to be muzzled during its work so that it would be able to eat some of the grain during the trampling or threshing process. Paul quickly clarifies, however, that God’s concern is not primarily the benefit the ox receives, even though it does. His primary focus is that the one who is using the ox is the one who benefits.

In other words, “Paul interprets 25:4 in a spiritual way, after the manner of the rabbis, to refer not to oxen, but to preachers of the gospel in his own time” (Brown, 342). Since Paul is the one who brought the spiritual benefits to the Corinthian Christians, he should receive support from them. But again, he refuses such support for the same reason noted above: Paul’s forfeiture of this right is designed for protection against false accusations of ulterior motives.

V. 10: “Or is He speaking assuredly for our sakes? For it has been written for our sake that the one must plow in hope and the thresher in hope of things to share”

Again, it is not about oxen but about men that God is speaking, and “speaking assuredly for our sakes.”

“The words *ploweth* and *thresheth*, are to be taken figuratively; as referring to the work of Christian preaching and instruction” (Bengel, 211); Alford (544) agrees, “*spiritual*, and *not literal*.”

Indeed, “those who **plough** and **thresh** in the Christian mission, whether in breaking the ground or in preparing the crops afterwards, are naturally entitled to get something material in reward for their **spiritual exertion**” (Moffatt, 117-118).

V. 11: “Since we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much for us to reap material support from you?”



Here, Paul delivers “a sudden, we may almost add humorous, descent from allegory to practical common sense” (Edwards, 231). The word “spiritual” referring, of course, to the things of God. In a somewhat, perhaps, whimsical way, Paul is asking if there is any pragmatic principle which would forbid him to receive material maintenance from the Church.

V. 12: “If others share this authority over you, do we not share more? But we have not made use of this authority, but are enduring all things, in order that we may not cause any hindrance to the gospel of Christ”

The word “others” refers to teachers who were not apostles who had come to the Church after Paul had left and their “authority” or “power” over them was not questioned but assumed by him. They had received support for their labours. Had they forgotten this little fact? Since Paul was the founder of the Church, he was even more deserving of their support. Yet, he did not exercise his right. It is a clear example of “self-denial for the sake of others and for the cause of Christ” (Gould, 78). Again, to receive support from the church could undercut the significance of his ministry there, as if some selfish motive was what energized him and motivated him in his work there. He was determined that he would not do anything which could conceivably contribute to his being “any hindrance” (*egkopen*) to the message he proclaimed by insisting “on his personal rights and liberties, an eloquent example for all modern men” (Robertson, 145). This word occurs here only in the NT.

V. 13: “Do you not realize that those who are working at the temple are getting the things for their livelihood from the temple [work], those who are serving at the altar are sharing from offerings at the altar?”

The priests who work in the temple, and especially at the altar, have their food supplied from the altar, provide another example of those who are supported by those they serve (Lev. 6:16; Num. 18:8, 31; Deut. 18:1-3). These were arrangements made by none other than God Himself.

V. 14: “So also the Lord gave instructions [that] those who are preaching the gospel [are] to live from the gospel”

Paul restates what Jesus Himself said in Mt. 10:10; Lk. 10:7; cp. Gal. 6:6.

Therefore, both OT and NT illustrate unmistakably that complete

material support is to be given to God's workers.

V. 15: "But I have not made use of any of these things. And I have not written these things in order it may become so in my case for it [is] better for me to die rather than anyone may make my ground for boasting worth nothing"

Nevertheless, Paul steadfastly refuses to take advantage of his rights. Furthermore, it was not "his purpose in writing in this strain to establish a claim for the future" (Morris, 136).

From here to the end of the chapter, Paul engages in a "growing torrent of animated appeal; his desire is that *he* alone should stand prominent, without concerning himself about others and how they might act and appear in these respects" (Meyer, 205).

His personal death is preferable to giving up his call to preach the gospel.

"The boasting of Paul [is] that he does not exercise his apostolic *exousia* to be supported by the churches, cp. 2 Cor. 11:10. By this *kauchema* he makes it plain that all his achievements and *exousia* are no ground for *kauchema*. It is simply laid upon him or given to him, by God that he does not merely accept the divine *anagke* as constraint, but freely endorses it. He demonstrates this by his abnegation, which is not designed to accredit him before God but before himself, and which is meant to show, not that he is greater than others, but that he is less than others. His opponents boast of their *exousia*, and Paul does not wish to stand on the same level with them, 2 C. 11:12" (Bultmann, 651-652).

"For Paul then, as for the OT, the element of trust is primary. This means that self-confidence is radically excluded. . . . Faith implies the surrender of all self-glorying, namely, in terms of their achievements in the propagation of faith. For it is not they themselves who work in their labours, but the grace of God. Each can stand before God only as one who has received. . . . The basic rejection of self-glorying is not contradicted by passages in which Paul boasts of his work. . . . He does not earn God's favour by the results of his missionary work, but vice versa. . . ." (Ibid, 648-651).

V. 16: "For if I am preaching the gospel, boasting is not in me; for compulsion is upon me, for it is a disaster for me if I may not preach the gospel"

Having stated that he would rather die than give up preaching the gospel, he sounds the trumpet that "a commanding call has gripped him and an inner constraint thrusts him forth to preach. Life would

be miserable for him if he did not preach the gospel. He cannot really boast about preaching. ***Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!***” (Brown, 343). It is a divinely appointed task to which he is committed and from which he will not turn away.

V. 17: “For if I am doing this of my own free will, I have a reward; and if against my own free will, I [still] have a management being committed to me”

Paul’s call was so clear and convincing that he did what he did of his “own free will.” His “reward” was his willingness to so work. He had been “entrusted with a stewardship [management] and so would go on with [his] task like any *oikonomos* (steward) even if *akon* (unwilling)” (Robertson, 147). He committed to God what God had committed to him.

V. 18: “Therefore, what is my reward? That having preached the gospel, I may offer the gospel free of charge, I myself not to make full use of my authority in the gospel”

Again, his “reward” was to preach without pay. “There is also reward in the results and in the joy of serving Christ. Paul spends himself for others and does not ask others to spend anything for him” (Brown, 343). Again, he refuses to exercise his right for recompense.

V. 19: “For being free from all, I made myself a slave to all, in order that I may win more and more”

Paul’s purpose in not using his right is to adapt himself to all and to do so without negatively affecting his character and conduct. On the most positive plank, he enslaves himself to others so that he may “win more and more.” As part of this selflessly designed enslavement, “he refuses payment in money that he may make the greater gain in souls” (Edwards, 238).

V. 20: “And I became to the Jews as a Jew, in order that I may win Jews; to those under the law as under law, though not myself being under law, in order that I may win those under law”

As part of or a manifestation of his making himself a slave to all in order to win more and more, to the Jews he became “as a Jew” – not “a Jew,” but “as a Jew” by which he meant “that he conformed to Jewish customs and methods of teaching adapted to them (See Acts 16:3; 21:20-26)” (Gould, 80). He repeats this truth in different words:

“to those under the law” (Jews) “as under law” by which he means that he was free from the Jewish law but not the law of God (cp. v. 21). In other words, “Paul conformed to practices which would enable him to approach *them that are under the law* with greater acceptability” (Morris, 138).

V. 21: “to those without law as without law, though not being without law of God but subject to law of Christ, in order that I may win those without law”

This manifestation continues: “to those without law” refers to the heathens or non-Jews. To those he became “as without law” by which he means without the revealed law which was given to the Jews and without conforming to that law.

Again, freedom from the Jewish law but subject to the law of Christ means three things: “(1) Freedom from all law as a means of justification (Rom. 3:20). (2) Freedom from the Jewish law as a past dispensation, superseded by the gospel. (3) Obligation, in no way annulled, to keep the law of Christ as a rule of conduct, which is involved in the idea of being a follower (literally *imitator*) of Christ” (Ibid, 81).

As far as possible, without compromise or without cheapening his call to winning people to Christ, he also conformed to practices by the Gentiles.

V. 22: “To the weak I became weak, in order that I may win the weak; I became all things to all in order that by all means I may save some”

The “weak” refers to “those with scruples – Paul avoided those things which they scrupulously avoided, in order to place no stumbling block in their way which would make it more difficult to win” (Bruce, 88). Paul was a man of “means” so to speak. He was determined to set forth “no unchristian compliance with men, but the practical wisdom of true Christian love and self-denial in the exercise of his office” (Findlay, 854-855).

Notice the smooth transition from “more and more” (v. 19) to “some.” He never entertained unrealistic expectations.

V. 23: “And I am doing all things for the sake of the gospel, in order that I may be sharing together God’s blessings in it”

Everything that Paul did was determined by and in conjunction with the gospel he proclaimed. Nevertheless, he is aware that by so doing he himself is “a sharer with others in the blessings of salvation” (Morris, 139).

The word translated “sharing together” (*sugkoinonos*) indicates being a “*participant, partner* (i.e., in the benefits promised by the gospel)” (BAG, 782); “*fellow-sharer, joint partaker*” (Moulton and Milligan, 609); “*participant with others in (anything), joint partner . . . with whom one is partaker of a thing*” (Thayer, 593). Salvation and the sharing of the gospel with others is no solo flight which is to be enjoyed by himself.

The word occurs only three other times in the NT: Rom. 11:17; Phil. 1:7; Rev. 1:9.

V. 24: “Do you not realize that all those running in a stadium are running, but only one receives the prize? So, keep on running in order that you may win”

Whether from personal observation or from circulated news about the foot-races which were held in stadiums throughout most of the Greek cities, Paul draws parallels with them and the Christian contest. In these races, of course, there are many participants but only one wins the prize. It was “an ivy or pine **wreath** that soon will fade in contrast to the **imperishable** life in the resurrection which awaits believers (cf. 15:53)” (Craig, 105). Vincent (236) calls it “a chaplet of pine-leaves.” For the runners in these stadium races, as well as the runners in the Christian race, there are certain elements which must be sustained: “training and self-discipline and self-control. The demands of Jesus Christ are high and exacting. His standards are a challenge and reproach to the world. They can never be sustained by desultory or spasmodic efforts. The Christian life and fellowship are no short, snapshot procedure: they require a long time exposure” (Short, 105-106).

V. 25: “And all who compete exercise self-control in all things. Therefore, they [do so] to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one”

Those who participated in the races were required to engage in appropriate training for ten months and “to practise in the gymnasium immediately before the games, under the direction of the judges who had themselves been instructed for ten months in the details of the games” (Vincent, 236).

“There is in the Christian arena a prize to be won – not as in the stadium where only one prize, and that perishable, is to be had, but a prize for all who attain the goal. ‘I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 3:14)” (Short, 106).

So, long training and self-control are needed in the athletic contests. Such disciplines are also a must “if excellence is to be achieved in the

Christian way of life. Pleasures that make one soft or less sensitive to spiritual things are to be forgone or strictly curtailed (Ibid.).

V. 26: “Therefore, I myself am running in such a manner as not without aim, I am boxing in such a manner as not beating the air”

Paul now declares emphatically that he himself is one of those participants and that he is running “as not without aim” (*adelos*) – a word which appears nowhere else in the NT. It denotes not “without a goal in mind.” That is, “not as one who has no fixed goal” (BAG, 16). He is running “with a clear perception of his object, and of the true manner and result of his striving” (Vincent, 236).

The metaphor now shifts to that of a boxer. The word “boxing” (*puk-teuo*) occurs here only in the NT. Paul says that he is not a shadow-boxer; that is, he is not boxing with an imaginary opponent for exercise or training. Rather, he knows “the things which oppose the believer, and [is constantly] contending against them” (Gould, 82).

V. 27: “But I am beating my body black and blue and bringing it under control, lest after having preached to others, I myself may be disqualified”

Instead of beating the air, Paul is beating himself. He is constantly fighting against the forces of evil outside of himself, as well as the tugs of temptation which are inside himself; tugs to transgressions against which he is and must always be fighting. It is “a knockout blow delivered to himself” (Craig, 106).

Indeed, even for the Christian, the body “is represented sometimes as the seat of sinful nature” (Gould, 82). The body and its availability for sinful passions and practices must always be actively resisted, reshaped, remolded, and released into the service of the Christian faith and its cultural roles, purposes, drives, and directions.

If this body is not constantly being subdued and brought under the control of the Spirit of God, the body will be less than the temple of God for which the new birth recreated it and transformed it as a vehicle through which the divine nature reveals itself in both conduct and character.

Even the privilege of being a preacher is not without potential poisonings.

In the stadium races, “an examination of the victorious combatants took place after the contest, and if it could be proved that they had contended unlawfully, or unfairly, they were deprived of the prize and drive with disgrace from the games” (Alford, 551).

Paul realizes that he himself is not exempt from this possibility.

This is why, therefore, he exercises extreme self-control and self-discipline not only in his training but also in the field of play. The word “disqualified” (*adokimos*) means that he may not stand the test and “might lose his crown through failing to satisfy his Lord (cf. iii. 15)” (Morris, 140). As Short (107) observes, “to the very last all his energies, spiritual, mental, and physical, are concentrated on the one great and all-inclusive purpose, ‘Necessity is laid upon me, Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!’”

### 3. Perils (10:1-11:1)

This section touches on warnings and encouragements. Despite the chapter division, there is no division of thought in the following verses. That is, in v. 27, Paul has just expressed the dreadful possibility of being personally disqualified from receiving the crown associated with satisfying his Lord in faithful service. If he fails in this regard, there is no recourse. As a spinoff of personal caution, and in his concern for Christians at Corinth, he uses the OT example of the Israelites and their failure to please God after the exodus from Egypt. He lays before them the dreadful possibility that such may happen to them. Care must be taken not to follow in the steps of the ancient Israelites.

This overview of this part of the letter provides valuable perspectives on its content: Vs. 1-6: The presumption of the ancient Israelites that they, as God’s people, were immune from divine punishment is both an illusion and a delusion. In fact, God was so displeased with them that he destroyed all over the age of twenty but two. Vs. 7-12: Warning against idolatry, immorality, and grumbling and the consequential destruction to which such leads. Vs. 13-14: Testings and temptations toward idolatry are not without deliverance. Vs. 15-22: Participation in the Lord’s Supper involves communion with Him and participation in the worship of idols involves communion with demons. Vs. 23-30: General principles: personal responsibility over eating sacrificial meat and concern for others; plus ultimate accountability to God. Vs. 31-33: All of life must be lived for the glory of God and the good of others.

V. 1: “For I do not want you to misunderstand, fellow Christians, that although all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea”

The word “for” introduces Paul’s concern about himself being disqualified from the crown of service in 9:27 to the larger audience of his fellow Christians in Corinth. What could happen to him could also happen to them.

Paul's foundation for extending this potential peril to his readers is in the OT itself. There are four concessive clauses in vs. 1-4 which serve as a prelude to the bomb being dropped in v. 5.

(1) "Our fathers" denotes the exodus/post-exodus experience of the Israelites leaving Egypt and their time in the wilderness. Their being "under the cloud" denotes the protective presence of God as He led them on their way (Ex. 13:21-22) through the Red Sea to safely reach the other shore.

V. 2: "and all had themselves baptized into [union with] Moses in the cloud and in the sea"

(2) To be "baptized" into union with Moses means that both he and they were inseparable as he led them, under God's protection ["cloud"] through the sea on dry ground. "The whole nation shared in the gifts of God which He in Moses gave to His people" (Grosheide, 220).

V. 3: "and all ate the same spiritual food"

(3) Reference to eating "the same spiritual food" indicates the provisions of manna, unmistakably bestowed by God's grace. The word "spiritual" (*pneumatikes*) denotes that it was not supplied by nature as its source but that it was supplied miraculously and/or supernaturally.

V. 4: "and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ"

(4) Reference to "the same spiritual drink" indicates the miraculous supply of water, which was not available in the natural order of things, as noted in v. 3.

Reference to a "spiritual rock . . . and the rock was Christ" clearly is in relation to Christ prior to His incarnation as Jesus in Bethlehem. It "implies that Christ was the source of the water which saved the Israelites from perishing of thirst" (Robertson and Plummer, 201). Paul chose the manna and the Rock instead of Jewish sacrificial feasts to communicate his point.

V. 5: "Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, for they were put to death in the wilderness"

The word "nevertheless" (*all'*) is a word of contrast; despite the provisions of God for their deliverance and their daily needs, their re-



sponse was not commendable by any stretch of the imagination. To say that “God was not pleased with most of them” is critical. It is important to note, however, that God did not send them back into Egypt, so their deliverance [i.e., salvation or regeneration] was an accomplished fact. But their response was not one of continued cooperation with God but one of rebellion and self-centered cries against God. Thanking Him for deliverance from the past and for His provisions in the present were absent, as was their lack of trusting Him for the future.

In fact, God’s displeasure was such that Num. 14:29-30 states that “all except Caleb and Joshua died without beholding the Holy Land, as a judgment of the Lord on their sins” (Gould, 85).

“It gives a graphic picture, the desert strewn with dead” (Robertson and Plummer, 202).

V. 6: “Now these things became examples for us not to live for evil passions as they did.”

By the word “examples” (*tupoi*) Paul is not saying that these OT wilderness experiences did not take place or were not actually factual. He is saying that “the meaning of those things was that they should teach the people of all the ages” (Grosheide, 223). Examples may be positive or negative. Here it is the latter and refers to things “to be avoided” (Robertson, 152); examples of guidance which are not to be followed. After all, the same sin of “evil passions” among the ancient Israelites was the same “evil passions” found in Corinth. By embracing rather than avoiding them, the guarantee is to “fail of the divine favor at last” (Gould, 85).

These “evil passions” are further specified in vs. 7-10:

V. 7: “And stop being idolaters like some of them, for it stands permanently written, **The people sat down to eat and to drink and stood up to playfully dance**”

The word “idolaters” (*eidololatrai*) refers to “the danger of partaking of the idol feasts” (Vincent, 240) or “of the sacrificial feasts of the heathen” (Bengel, 217).

The OT passage which “stands permanently” as the portrayal of the sin of idolatry is Exodus 32:6. It refers to the sexually arousing or “lascivious dancing around the calf and a vain one, on account of the idol” (Ibid.).

V. 8: “Let us stop practicing immorality, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell dead in one day”

In fact, the point in v. 7 about idolatry is further punctuated by its link with immorality, the horrific result being that twenty-three thousand died in one day.

This refers to Numb. 25:1-9 where “Israelite men engaged in immoral sexual activity with Moabite women” (Blomberg, 192).

V. 9: “Let us stop testing the Lord’s [patience], as some of them did and were being destroyed [day by day] by snakes”

This third example of “evil passions” refers to Num 21:4-9 where the people complained to Moses and God about the trying times and hardships in the desert. As a result of their murmurings, God sent fiery snakes to destroy them over a period of several days.

V. 10: “All of you must stop grumbling, as some of them grumbled and were destroyed by the destroying angel”

Paul orders them to stop the grumbling which was already in motion by the Corinthians with the implication that they too may suffer the loss of life.

This fourth example refers to Numb. 16:41-50 when “their opposition to God’s judgment of Korah’s rebellion led to an additional 14, 700 deaths” (Blomberg, 192).

As Gould (86) observes, “possibly, Paul had in mind a like disposition among the Corinthians to murmur against their regularly appointed teachers.”

The word “destroying angel” (*olothreutou*) occurs here only in the NT and refers to the destroying angel in Ex. 12:23.

“The application is clear enough. Murmuring calls down divine punishment” (Morris, 144).

V. 11: “Now these things continued happening to them as a warning or example, and were written for our instruction, for whom the ends of the ages have arrived”

The verb “continued happening” (*sumbainen*) is in the imperfect tense which “sets forth the enumerated events as in process of happening” (Robertson and Plummer, 207).

The word “warning” (*tupikos*) first appeared in v. 6. “The pattern of divine revelation, human disobedience and divine judgment manifested in the Israelites’ experience from Egypt to Canaan is reproduced in the NT era” (Bruce, 93).

“These things” were written down so that they would not be forgot-

ten. Instead as written scripture, they serve to instruct us in the things of God.

The phrase, “for whom the ends of the ages have arrived” is another way of designating “Christians.” These things are “to warn the Christians of the near approach of judgment. The temptations of Christians are more perilous, because they do not tread the low plain of earthly rewards and punishments, but belong to the spiritual sphere of the kingdom of God” (Edwards, 250).

V. 12: “So then the one who seems to be standing must beware lest he may fall”

The warning to “the one who seems to be standing” is about being “over-confident” or “cocksure of their position” (Morris, 144). After all, the Israelites had been “over-confident” and this led to disaster for them. Nevertheless,

no one can risk contamination with pagan rites, imagining that he is safe because he has a **standing in the faith** and belongs to God’s own people; particularly, he must not dream of supplementing or enjoying the Christian communion with any similar feast of a pagan cult (verse. 21), as our fathers did. (Moffatt, 133).

V. 13: “Temptation/Trial has not taken hold of you except what is characteristic to mankind. And God is faithful Who shall not allow you to be tempted/tried beyond what you are able [to bear] but together with the temptation/trial shall make the way of escape to be able to endure”

The word translated “temptation/trial” (*peirasmos*) occurs here only in this letter. [It occurs elsewhere in the NT: Mt. 6:13; 26:41; Mk. 14:38; Lk. 4:13; 8:13; 11:4; 22:28, 40, 46; Acts 20:19; Ga. 4:14; 1 Tim. 6:9; Heb. 3:8; Jam. 1:2, 12; 1 Pt. 1:6; 4:12; 2 Pt. 2:9; Rev. 30]. It typically denotes “period or process of testing, trial, temptation to evil, enticement to evil,” with the exact meaning dependent upon how it is used in any particular verse or section of scripture. Here, Paul is referring to “the difficulties into which a Christian can be brought [and] to which all are exposed. . . . Paul is warning the over-strong and self-confident Corinthians against failing, a possibility which they obviously do not take seriously enough. He is also consoling the weak; they should not be too worried about their capacity” (Seesemann, 28-29).

The temptations specific to the Corinthians were obviously *idolatry*,

*sexual immorality, testing God's patience, and grumbling.* However, these were not unique to them but fall under the umbrella of "what is characteristic to mankind," that is, common to all people or "such as belong to human life" (Gould, 87).

Therefore, the Corinthians should not be shocked or surprised at these temptations or tests or trials.

The solace, of course, is found not in themselves but in the God Who has called them and commissioned them to be his people of service. After all, Christians are still human beings and imperfect and are subject to temptations/tests/trials as par for the course. As Short (111) so succinctly and strategically notes:

Man is imperfect and therefore is subject to temptation. No one who was wholly perfect could be tempted, even as God cannot be tempted, in the sense that he cannot be the victim of moral seduction to evil ways and practices. There is nothing in the being of God to which such temptation can appeal. Nor could anyone who is wholly evil be tempted: for there would be in such a person, e.g., Satan, no moral element which the appeal for better, finer things could stimulate.

So, God's faithfulness is the key to understanding and responding to these various assaults. After all, no person should rely exclusively on his/her own strength to survive these strategic assaults because God provides His own strength to aid in these endeavors with evil.

Can the various temptations be too tough for God's people to handle? Does God, as the Father of His children, allow temptations to which His children are hopelessly entrapped? Can the trials be or become too heavy to bear or endure? Does God always provide an "escape" from temptations?

Paul asserts that just as God allows these temptations to come He also creates escape routes from them. Craig's response (112) is apt: "Some might ask why they should flee from idolatry if God could be depended upon to **provide a way of escape**. Certainly **the way of escape** does not mean that men can be free from temptation, but that they are enabled to stand up under it. If sin is near, so is God."

The word translated "escape" (*ekbasis*) indicates "*a way out of a de-file, a mountain pass*. The idea is of an army apparently surrounded and then suddenly seeing an escape route to safety. No man need fall to any temptation, for with the temptation there is the way out, and the way out is not the way of surrender nor of retreat, but the way of conquest in the power of the grace of God" (Barclay, 90).

“The way of escape” does not necessarily mean not experiencing the temptation but escaping the perils associated with it and “from its deadly embrace” (Lenski, 405). Some suggested ways include: (1) praying beforehand, as well as during the assault; (2) letting others know of your assault and getting their prayerful support; (3) knowing your own weakness or susceptibility to items of temptations; (4) running to Jesus during it; (5) quoting scripture; (6) planning resistance techniques before temptations arise; (7) running away from it, as the next verse states.

V. 14: “Therefore, my fellow Christians, you must run away from idolatry”

The words translated “my fellow Christians” (*agapetoi mou*) are, as always, used to denote an attitude and atmosphere of genuine care, strong affections, and passionate pleading for his readers.

The word “idolatry” (*eidololatrias*) occurs only here in this letter.

[It occurs elsewhere in the NT: Gal. 5:20; Col. 3:5; 1 Pt. 4:3.]

Buchsel (379) notes: “Paul will allow the enjoyment of *eidolothuton* apart from the cultic act itself (1 C. 10:14-22) and so long as it does not violate the law of love (8:1-13). In this connection he appeals (10:26) to Ps. 24:1. He can take this attitude only because faith has overcome Jewish legalism from within.”

The imperative “you must run away” (*pheugete*) is in the present tense denoting an habitual, ongoing process of shunning, avoiding, turning away from, fleeing.”

V. 15: “I am speaking as to wise ones; You must determined what I mean”

Here Paul is speaking to them as those with intelligence: i.e., “practical wisdom and good sense” (Parry, 150). “Any intelligent man knows that those who take part in a sacrificial feast participate in the deity for whom and with whom they eat and drink” (Moffatt, 134).

When he says, “you must determined what I mean,” he is not only recognizing their intelligence and their ability to discern what is sound and what is not, but is also including “perhaps a gentle rebuke in the compliment” (Robertson and Plummer, 211).

V. 16: “The cup of blessing which we are blessing, is it not participation with the blood of Christ? The bread which we are breaking, is it not participation with the body of Christ?”

This is the Christian feast and to participate in it means to participate

and be joint-sharers in Christ Himself. This excludes participation in any other feast.

The “blessing” refers to consecrating “the material bread and wine to their spiritual purpose” (Goudge, 88).

The “breaking” indicates the “distribution to all the faithful ones . . . the Church as a whole; we do not seek an individual gift for ourselves” (Ibid., 89).

Indeed, just as the Jewish Passover “was celebrated by families, typifying an unbroken fellowship of those who formed one body, with the God who had passed by the blood-sprinkled doors” (Vincent, 242), even so, the Christian Passover is centered in Christ but in connection with one another.

Blomberg (199) emphasizes a relevant but touchy point:

It is ironic too that the very meal intended to demonstrate the unity of believers (vv. 16-17) has become one of the most divisive ceremonies of the Christian church throughout its history. The irony increases when we recognize that even when congregations can agree to put aside doctrinal differences so fundamental that unbelievers (though church members) can partake of the Lord’s Supper, still genuine Christians in other denominations may be excluded.

This “participation” or “communion” is centered in Christ, just as the Jewish festivals centered in the altar (v. 18). Of course, the participation of the heathen feasts centered in demons and other objects of worshipping idols. There can be no joint-communion or participation in these opposing feasts.

V. 17: “Since [there is] one bread, though we are many [there is] one body, for we all sharing out of one bread”

Paul stresses assurance about the oneness of the body of Christ: “through loaf and cup we realize our communion with Christ” (Findlay, 55).

The early church used a single loaf to symbolize unity among all believers. In its intended meaning and portrayal, the Lord’s Supper or communion or sacrament “springs from unity and creates unity” (Morris, 146).

V. 18: “Look at nation of Israel: Are not those who are eating the sacrifices participants of the altar?”

The literal words are “the Israel according to flesh” (*ton 'Irael kata sarka*) which means the nation of Israel, consisting of those Jews or Hebrews of natural descent. These are to be distinguished from the new people of God or the spiritual Israel which consists of both Jews and Gentiles who exercise faith in the God Who manifested Himself fully or completely in Jesus (Rom. 2:28; 9:8; Ga. 3:7). As noted in v. 16, these national Israelites who offered “sacrifices have a spiritual participation in the altar” (Robertson, 155).

V. 19: “So, what do I mean? That meat sacrificed to idols is anything or that an idol is anything?”

In the form of interrogatives, Paul is saying that those who ate the flesh of animals which had been offered to pagan idols were participants with the idols, and that it was really an exercise in futility or emptiness. Why? Because an idol does not really exist in such a way as to bring about any positive spiritually significant consequences.

V. 20: “But that which they are sacrificing [is] to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to be participants with the demons”

In fact, the consequences will be absolutely negative and detrimental. Why? Because these idols were substitutes for the one and only true God which put them in partnership with demons and the forces of evil – *idolatry*, in other words.

V. 21: “You are not able to drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you are not able to share in the table of the Lord and the table of demons”

What the cup of the Lord and the cup of the demons stood for or represented were diametrically opposed to one another. They were totally incompatible.

V. 22: “Are we making jealous the Lord? Are we stronger than him?”

Seeking to have it both ways creates undesirable realities. It is nothing short of “madness to act in such a way as deliberately to court the wrath of the Almighty” (Bruce, 97). Yet, “such double-dealing will do this very thing” (Robertson, 156).

In fact, “if the Cor. are daring Christ’s sovereign displeasure by coquetting with idolatry, they must suppose themselves ‘stronger than He’” (Findlay, 866). Surely, such sensible, intelligent, and wise men can see the absolute absurdity of such perilous actions.

V. 23: “All things are lawful but all things are not advantageous; all things are lawful but all things are not edifying”

When Paul says “all things are lawful but all things are not advantageous,” he means things “not having a moral quality” (Gould, 90). That is, they are not morally beneficial or advantageous to the person who is engaged in doing lawful things.

All things which are lawful may also not be edifying.

“Edification, in its proper meaning, is always relative to the community. Paul is safe-guarding not the particular interests of ‘the weak brother’ so much as the welfare of the Church, when he says, ‘Not all things edify’” (Findlay, 867).

V. 24: “Do not seek your own things but the things of the other”

For something to be “lawful” is not enough in itself. It must also be evaluated in terms of its results on others being positive or negative. What results in consequences on others being good or constructive must be the guiding principle in one’s behavior. The Christian’s freedom “is not found in expressing an individual right but in helping others grow spiritually” (Brown, 350).

V. 25: “You are to eat anything being sold in the meat market without asking for conscience sake”

The word translated “meat market” (*makello*) occurs here only in the NT.

In the heathen sacrifices, it was common that only a part of the animal was eaten. What was not eaten was “given to the priests or to the poor, or sold again in the market. Any buyer might therefore unknowingly purchase meat offered to idols” (Vincent, 245).

Objectively speaking, “the Christian may buy meat offered for sale, without any anxious inquiries as to the source from which it comes; without making any inquiry on conscientious grounds” (Goudge, 91). So, a Christian should not be overly-scrupulous in the matter.

V. 26: “For **the earth and the fullness of it belongs to the Lord**”

The primary purpose of this verse is that “no examination is necessary” (Grosheide, 241) when it comes to juggling the question: to eat or not to eat.

After all, the earth and everything in it – including meats – belongs



to the Lord.

This OT quotation is from Ps. 24:7; 50:12; 89:11. This reenforces the fact that all creation belongs to God and not the demons. Even in the idol sacrifices, their ceremonies cannot make the flesh of animals belong to anyone but God.

V. 27: “If someone who is not a believer invites you and you wish to go, eat anything set before you without asking questions for conscience’ sake”

Every Christian has friends or relatives who are not Christians. The implication of this verse is that the Christian “is under no obligation to break off his relations with them (5:9f)”(Grosheide, 242).

The meeting under consideration would likely be a general meeting somewhere and “not to a temple feast (8:10) which was prohibited” (Robertson, 157). So, if a non-Christian invites a Christian to his home or elsewhere, the Christian may go and conduct himself with gentleness and peace.

The phrase “if you wish to go” indicates the likelihood of going but not without considering the potential difficulties of such a meeting. So, Bengel suggests that “Paul does not altogether approve this, nor forbid it” (221).

Interestingly enough, Paul does not discourage social interactions with non-Christians. “Wilfull sin must not be overlooked in members of the Church, but the heathen must not be judged by a Christian standard” (Goudge, 91).

V. 28: “And if someone may say to you, ‘This is meat sacrificed to idols,’ do not eat it for the sake of the one informing you and for conscience’ sake”

Paul is likely referring to the conscience of an unenlightened Christian. [After all] “the conscience of a heathen would not be likely to be troubled by such a matter” (Goudge, 91).

This verse seems prefatory to verses 29-30 where the weak or unenlightened brother is in view.

V. 29: “Now I mean his conscience not yours, for why is my freedom being judged by the conscience of another?”

The conscience of the unenlightened brother is in focus. The idea is that he would, by the example of the enlightened brother, be led to do what he personally thought was inappropriate or wrong. Indeed, the strong or enlightened brother is not under obligation

to refuse the sacrificial meat for his own sake but for the sake of the weak or unenlightened brother.

Farrar (326) clarifies: “The mere fact that another person *thinks* that we are doing wrong does not furnish the smallest proof that we *are* wrong. We stand or fall only to our own Master, and our consciences are free to form their own independent conclusion.”

V. 30: “If I am partaking with gratitude, why am I being spoken against concerning that of which I am giving thanks?”

If Paul is eating sacrificial meat at a non-Christian’s house, and is giving thanks in connection with the meal, it is possible that someone may criticize or speak against him for so doing. However, the giving of thanks in association with the act of eating is also associated with “the worship of God, and so of course leaves no room for the supposition that it is an entanglement with idol-worship” (Gould, 92).

“Thanksgiving sanctifies all meat; it denies the authority of idols, and asserts God’s” (Bengel, 221).

V. 31: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the manifestation of God’s presence”

This principle of Paul is wholesome and wholistic. “God would be glorified by the enlightened Corinthian, as he claimed the whole creation as God’s. He would be glorified still more, when the same Corinthian forbore to assert his liberty, because of the danger to another. God’s love is a higher attribute than His sovereignty” (Goudge, 92).

This principle must regulate the behaviors of all Christians at all times. All must be done so as to never dishonor God and the manifestation of His presence in one’s midst.

V. 32: “Stop leading others into sin by your lifestyle, not only Jews but also Greeks and the church of God”

Loving God cannot be separated from loving fellow Christians. It is this highest regard for the welfare of others which prevents one Christian from leading another one into sin. This requires a Christian to voluntarily place limits on any degree of freedom which he possesses out of concern for another Christian.

The implementation of this principle has wide ranging repercussions for those within and without the church. Paul reveals this in his threefold differentiation: Jews, Greeks, and the church of God, the

latter of which encompasses both Jews and Greeks into one body in Christ.

V. 33: “Just as I myself am seeking to please all in all things, not seeking my own benefit but for the many, in order that some may be saved”

This is a recall and summation of the truths declared in chapter 9. For the sake of winning some to the Lord, this must be the guiding principle and passion in dealing with others.

This explains in brief why Paul sought the salvation of others, “and for which he sacrificed such things as his personal opinion about the differences between Jews and Greeks, those under law and those not under law” (Gould, 92).

Indeed, “in view of so worthy and so serious an object, he gives up all thought of personal advantage and seeks only their good” (Beet, 176).

11:1: “You must become imitators of me just as I myself am of Christ”

In setting himself before his readers as an example to follow, he qualifies it with a reminder that Jesus Christ is the greatest example of the One Who spent His life foregoing His rights. Paul sought to imitate Christ in this regard.

Indeed, Paul’s “mind is absorbed in the greatness of self-denial manifested by the Son of God in taking upon Him the form of a servant and humbling Himself by His obedience unto the death of the cross” (Edwards, 267).

#### C. Significant Worship (11:2-14:40)

This section touches on problems within the Church in relation to the veiling of women in public worship and the Lord’s Supper. It also focuses on some positives in relation to spiritual gifts, sacrificial love, and additional perspectives on spiritual gifts.

This overview of this part of the letter provides valuable perspectives on its content: Vs. 2-16: Women should pray and prophesy only if their heads are veiled. “Although in the realm of nature women is set under man (vv. 3, 7-9), in the realm of redemption (“in the Lord, v. 10) they are mutually dependent on one another and need each other (vv. 11-12), and therefore women should cover that sign of their subservience to man (their hair) – not to do so would dishonour their Head, Christ (v. 5a-a pun on the word “head”). The veil is their sign of authority, in Christ, to pray and prophesy” (John Morgan-Wynne, 12; Dilday). Vs. 17-34: It was inappropriate for the wealthy and well-to-do to

engage in eating and drinking prior to the arrival of the poor church members. In fact, it was nothing short of “shame” (v. 21-22). Such behavior was in contrast to the meaning of the Lord’s Supper in which mutual loving fellowship should not be compromised or invalidated. “They should make sure that they have taken the edge off their appetites at home so that they will not behave in an unseemly way ‘in church’ (vv. 33-34)” (Ibid, 13).

1. Problems (11:2-12:30)

a. Veiling of Women (11:2-16)

V. 2: “Now I commend you because you yourselves are persistently remembering me and, just as I gave [them] to you, you are consistently keeping the traditional teachings handed down to you”

Paul commends them for not forgetting him and the teachings he gave the church upon founding it. The word “remembering” (*memnesthe*) is in the perfect tense which denotes a state or condition of complete and persistent remembrance.

Their remembrance was obviously couched in the “traditional teachings” (*parakoseis*) Paul had handed down to them from various bits of information, guidelines for conduct, and any other principles deemed appropriate for the Christian faith. If scripture was included in these teachings, it would refer to the OT in concert with what the apostles and other early Christian leaders had preached and taught. In other words, Paul had delivered “to them what had been *delivered* to him” (Vincent, 246).

Nevertheless, apparently there had been some discussion or debate about how to apply certain of these teachings to their church. One of those teachings had to do with the role of men/husbands and women/wives in praying and prophesying in public worship settings which he here addresses.

V. 3: “But I want you to completely realize that Christ [is] the head of every man, and the husband [is the] head of every wife, and God [is the] head of the Christ”

He first lays down the principle of appropriate order for relationships from God’s standpoint.

The threefold use of “head” (*kephale*) serves as the foundation of this spiritual order in creation, and the covering or not of the physical head in public worship. The word implies a balance between authority and submission.

To say that “Christ is the head of every man” refers to His supremacy over every human family and to whom accountability is required. There is no other ultimate authority for whom and to whom such recognition for submission can be compared. To say that “a husband is the head of a wife” refers to the husband’s responsible supremacy over her; it does not indicate that she is inferior in some sort of demeaning fashion. “The unit of society, according to the apostle, is not the individual but the family, and in the family the husband is the natural head” (Erdman, 98).

As Schlier (679) notes, “In this relation of man and woman we are dealing with the very foundations of their creaturehood. . . we have a determination of their being and not just of the mode of their historical manifestation.”

The main idea here is that there is

no humiliation, no injustice, no wrong. It recognizes a difference of function and responsibility, but it precludes selfishness, harshness and unkindness. If the husband remembers his relation to Christ, he will not abuse his relation to the wife he is expected to honor and support and protect and love. (Erdman 98-99)

As Berquist echoes, “A man is ‘so to love his wife even as himself.’ This leaves no room for tyranny, arrogance, assertiveness, domination, or cruelty on the one hand; it leaves no room for fear, timidity, cowardice, or servility on the other” (83).

To say that “God is the head of Christ” refers, in a limited way, to Christ’s having a human nature, but in a more emphatic way, it denotes “God is supreme in reference to the Messiah as having sent Him” (Robertson and Plummer, 229).

Upon these foundational planks, Paul now transitions specifically to how public worship for men and women is to transpire.

V. 4: “Every man, while praying or prophesying with his head simultaneously covered, is disgracing his head”

The words “praying or prophesying” indicate active involvement in public worship services.

The word “praying” (*proseuchomenos*) would indicate public prayers in connection with “prophesying” (*propheteuon*) which “denotes inspired teaching in general” (Gould, 94). It is the *forthtelling* of inspired truths from God and not just or even primarily the *foretelling* of future events or happenings.

The physical covering of his head, while in a position of praying or prophesying, would be “disgracing his head” – Who is Christ. Since the covering of his physical head indicates submission, he thereby would be acknowledging figuratively “a superior among men other than Christ” (Parry 158).

V. 5: “And every woman, while praying or prophesying with her head uncovered, is disgracing her head; for she is one and the same with the one in the permanent condition of a shaved head”

The words “while praying or prophesying” indicate that it was common practice for women in the church to take an active part in public worship. The exercising of these religious activities with an uncovered head denotes her repudiating any submission to her husband.

To be “one and the same with the one in the permanent condition of a shaved head” means she has discarded her womanhood by doing away with her natural covering. Furthermore, to shave the head was to be associated with “a convicted adultress in Jewish circles or of the more ‘masculine’ partner in a lesbian relationship in the Greek world” (Blomberg, 211). She thereby was a disgrace to her husband because she is sending mixed signals about her sexuality. She is also aborting her reputed commitment to Christ and the Christian community.

V. 6: “For if a woman is not covering her head, her hair is also to be cut off; and if it is shameful for a woman to cut her hair off or to be shaved, she must cover her head”

This verse yields additional proof to vs. 5 in a general way and seems to underscore the irrationality of the matter. Simply put: “that which a woman is obliged to do under different circumstances, she must do also when she worships, when she prays or prophecies. It is shameful for a woman to have her head uncovered in public” (Grosheide, 254).

Beck translates, “If a woman wears nothing on her head, she should also get her hair cut. But if it is a disgrace for a woman to get her hair cut or shaved off, she should keep her head covered.”

V. 7: “For man it is, indeed, a must not to have his head covered, being [the] image and glory of God; and the woman is the glory of man”

Paul's point is further stressed by the fact that man is both the image and glory of God, while the woman is simply the glory of man. As Vincent (247) observes: "Man represents God's authority by his position as ruler of the woman. In the case of the woman, the word *image* is omitted, although she, like the man, is the image of God. Paul is expounding the relation of the woman, not to God, but to man."

Schlier (679) echoes the same from a slightly different twist: "Hence man is the image and reflection of God to the degree that in his created being he points directly to God as Creator. Woman is the reflection of man to the degree that in her created being she points to man, and only with and through him to God."

V. 8: "For man is not from woman but woman from man"

Paul now "explains this subordinate relation" (Parry, 159) by referring to Genesis 2:21-23. This gives a sanctified sense of superiority to the man. Robertson (161) says "on the other hand, it is equally logical to argue that woman is the crown and climax of all creation, being the last." This "hand," however, distorts or demolishes the pulse of Paul's stated position. "Am I missing something" Dr. Robertson?

V. 9: "For man was not created for the sake of woman but woman for the sake of man"

This verse echoes Genesis 2:18. Here, "it is not the *manner* of creation, *ek tou andros* that is emphasized but the *occasion* of creation, *dia ton andra*" (Alford, 566). That is, "the explanation of this fact must be sought in the Divine purpose that brought it to pass; for the woman was created 'because of' (*dia*) the man, to be his helpmeet"

V. 10: "For this reason the woman is to have authority over her head for the sake of angels"

The word "authority" (*exousia*) means "the man's power and authority over her" (Lenski, 445).

Ramsay notes that "in Oriental lands the veil is the power and the honour and dignity of the woman. With the veil on her head she can go anywhere in security and profound respect . . . She is supreme in the crowd" (204-205). However, if the veil is not on her head, her "authority and dignity vanish" (205).

On the basis of Ramsay's observations, Morris (154) states that the meaning is "that by covering her head the woman secures her own place of dignity and authority. At the same time she recognizes her subordination." In other words,

as man in public worship manifests his authority by leaving his head unveiled, so woman manifests hers by wearing a **veil**. Her status in Christ does not mean that the creation ordinances are already things of the past; she should keep her head covered **because of the angels**, who are guardians of the created order. (Bruce, 106).

So, "for the sake of angels" refers to God's good angels who meet with His people when they worship. So, there must be no impropriety or improper conduct which could occur if women prayed and prophesied with uncovered heads. This would be offensive to God's design in creation (cp. Bruce, 106).

Robertson (160) shares this perspective: "angels present in worship (cf. 1 Cor. 4:9; Psa. 138:1) who would be shocked at the conduct of the women since the angels themselves veil their faces before Jehovah (Isa. 6:2)." Alford (567) agrees.

V. 11: "Nevertheless, neither is woman independent of man nor man independent of woman in the Lord"

As Alford (568) notes, "yet neither sex is insulated and independent of the other in the Christian life."

So, here Paul stresses the "interdependence of man and woman" (Bruce, 106), thus "modifying the preceding representation of the supremacy of man" (Gould, 95).

The phrase "in the Lord" refers to their relationship with each other as Christians [and] their general relations in life" (Ibid.).

V. 12: "For just as the woman [is] out of the man, even so the man [is] through the woman; and all things [are] from God"

Findlay (874) quotes Tennyson: "Either sex alone is half itself . . . each fulfils defect in each, and always thought in thought, purpose in purpose, will in will, they grow . . . the two-celled heart beating, with one full stroke, life." Both man and woman are indebted to Him who issues "all things." Indeed, it is the Christian life which "unites them in Christ [and] is agreeable to God's ordinance" (Alford, 568).



V. 13: “You must judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with uncovered head?”

Following Paul’s portrayal of the interdependence between man and woman, he now appeals to sheer common sense. The word “proper” (*prepon*) serves as the axis around which this question and their common sense is to revolve and be resolved. The word denotes what is “*suitable, fitting, proper, right*” (BAG, 706); Lenski adds, “to shine forth, to be distinguished, excellent, worthy” (448).

[This word occurs elsewhere in the NT: Rom. 1:26; 2:14, 27; 11:21, 24 [thrice]; Gal. 2:15; 4:8; Eph. 2:3; Ja. 3:7 [twice]; 2 Pt. 1:4] Common sense would lead one to think that a consensus would appear among them, that “their common-sense approach to the subject would reflect the prevailing customs of the day” (Howard, 96).

However, there was not a single or universal custom among Jews and Greeks at the time. Among the Jews, for example, both men and women tended to cover their heads at worship. Among the Greeks, “both sexes worshipped with *uncovered* head, although women covered their heads at other times . . . while Roman men and women alike *covered* their heads during religious rites” (Findlay, 873).

Paul, therefore, sliced the Greek custom: uncovered for men and covered for women.

V. 14: “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is shameful for him?”

Paul now transitions to “nature itself” (*he phusis aute*) as another basis for his position. Nature, in other words, “is personified as the teacher of men. Nevertheless, it simply represents the general order of nature and its only task is to remind us of what is seemly and becoming” (Koster, 273). Nature, that is, as opposed to some temporary fashion, fad, or favorite length of hair.

So, what does “nature” say about hair-styles? And what does it mean in the city of Corinth? How long is too long and how short is too short? Does nature answer these type questions?

Many Greek men wore longer hair and many women wore shorter hair. Roman women tended to wear longer hair which was parted down the middle, while Roman men who wore longer hair ran the risk of being scorned or ridiculed as being effemi-

nate.

In his book, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, Thomas Matthews notes that “Greek and Roman male gods were frequently depicted with long, flowing hair as a sign of their ‘divinity,’ because it distinguished them from ordinary men” (126).

So, in light of these collective scriptural and cultural variables, and considering Paul’s prior emphasis on idol worship, sexual immorality, the testing of God’s patience, etc., his statements about hair length seem to flow in general tendencies, even though exceptional cases may need to be considered: personal stylistic preferences apart from any links with sexual perversions or idolatry practices; health crises which may affect hair length; temporary adoptions of harmless or innocuous cultural patterns associated with hair styles; etc.

V. 15: “And if a woman may have long hair it is her glory? Because her hair has been given to her instead of a covering.”

As a general rule of thumb, women wear their hair longer than men. It is her “glory” (*doxa*) in the sense that it manifests her presence in a common way to distinguish her from men. Her hair is now linked with a perfect tense verb - “has been given to her” (*dedotai*) – which stresses an existing state of being whereby her “womanly distinction” (Lenski, 449) is commonly obvious.

Lenski’s additional comments are appropriate:

The fact that a woman’s hair grows quite long by nature, much longer than a man’s even if he never cuts it, and that thus there is bestowed on woman the gift of a *peribolaion* [“covering”] is nature’s own indication that, when it comes to significant customs, she and not the man is to have her head covered in the presence of God during worship. ‘It is given her instead of a covering’ means: in place of a covering, to take the place of a covering, and this establishes the decorum or propriety of wearing a covering over the head. For if long hair is an honor for a woman because it is given her in place of a covering, then any proper custom which accentuates this honor must be prized accordingly. This is the correct deduction which Paul has in mind.

(449-450)

Lenski (450-451) offers four significant variables, which I here briefly list, which the readers may find valuable to explore in more detail: 1. The facts of creation and of nature stand unchanged. 2. Many customs have sprung up that have no deeper basis than transient fashion. 3. Some customs have a deeper basis. 4. Customs may be entirely different and even opposite among different people.

V. 16: “And if one seems to be argumentative, we do not have a customary practice other than this, [and] neither [do] the churches of God”

Paul expects (*ei* – “if” - 1<sup>st</sup> class conditional clause which assumes reality) that some in Corinth will be “argumentative”(*philoveikos* – from two words: *philos* [“lovers”] and *neikos* [“a disputer for disputation’s sake” (Findlay, 876)]), thus one who thinks in a quarrelsome, debative, contentious, pugnacious or combative manner. This word appears here only in the NT.

Paul, however, will not choose to argue back and forth about the matter. He simply states that this is a “customary practice” (*sunetheian* – in the NT only here and 8:7) which is followed by all other churches of God, and should be adopted in Corinth as well.

“Congregational autonomy is not admitted in a matter of this kind. . . [But] it is often not easy for us to distinguish our own customary procedures from the eternal will of God” (Craig, 129). Its significance, therefore, is seen in that, as Bruce (108) notes, “a tendency on the part of the Corinthian church to be a law to itself, without reference to Christian procedure elsewhere, is implied below in 14:36.” No wonder Paul adds this semi-sarcastic, yet *gentle reminder* of the nature of the case at Corinth.

b. Lord’s Supper (11:17-34)

V. 17: “On the other hand, for this [that] I am transmitting, I am not commending because you are not coming together for the better but for the worse”

The word translated “on the other hand” (*de*) ‘is commonly used as an *adversative* particle [but also] is *emphatic* or *intensive*’ (Dana and Mantey, 244). In 1897, Jannaris stated that “this conjunction is generally ranked wholly as an adversative

particle” (407). As early as 1891, Monro said: “The adversative *de* properly indicates that the new clause stands in some *contrast* to what has preceded (i.e., to show that the new fact is not simultaneous, as *te* would imply)” (245).

So, with this adversative, Paul contrasts his “commendation” (*epaino*) in v. 2 with the opposite or absence (*ouk epaino*) of it in this verse. It is a contrast/comparison (Robertson, 663) in which he will state more clearly why such commendation is being withheld.

The verb “transmitting” (*paraggellon*) means “to pass along directions or orders from one person to another” (Lenski, 453). That is, in this transmitting process, he is *shaming* and *blaming* them for what he is about to unfold.

The present tense verb “coming together” (*sunerchesthe*) denotes that this was an ongoing or habitual happening among them, not a single episode or an occasional slip-up.

In other words, when they came together for eating and the Lord’s Supper, their following specified behaviors manifested and/or resulted in “the worse” (*to hesson*) rather than “the better” (*to kreisson*); that is, their spiritual and relation degeneration rather than spiritual and relational improvement.

“As he advances, his rebukes become more and more serious; for the present reproach does not affect a few, but the Church assembly in general” (Farrar, 563).

He will now expose the meat of the matter.

V. 18: “For in the first place, when you come together in the church [meetings] I keep on hearing about divisions to be among you and I believe some of it”

The word translated “in the first place” or “first of all” (*proton*) could easily be misunderstood, especially since there is no follow-up: second, third, etc. Its meaning, therefore, is “the primary reason” (Robertson, 162) for Paul’s refusal to commend them in this area.

That is, when the fellow Christians “come together” or assemble themselves for worship, it was customary to meet in people’s houses. These meetings were frequently called “love-feasts” (Farrar, 363).

However, Paul says that instead of hearing about their mutual respect, patience, and considerate interactions with one another, he “keeps on hearing about divisions.” The word translated “divisions” (*schismata* – from which we get the English word “schisms,” and refers to “splits, rifts, opposing groups” which

tear at each other.

Although there is no specific number of groups mentioned, it seems likely that it refers, partially at least, to those Paul isolated in 1:12 – Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Christ: “individual leaders who are played off the one against the other in authority . . . rather than firmly formulated doctrinal differences and programs that separated the various schools” (Maurer, 964).

The added expression, “and I believe some of it” (*meros ti pisteuo*) may mean that he believes “some” of what he is “hearing” but not *all* of it. Morris (157) concludes that “there was some exaggeration in the account that had reached him, but he recognized also an unpleasant amount of truth.” Bruce (109) suggests the following meaning: it “does not suggest that he thought their report exaggerated, but that he was already prepared in some degree for news of this kind by the conviction that such developments must be expected before the end.”

V. 19: “For it must be factions among you in order that the approved ones themselves may be manifested among you”

Here Paul uses another word to describe what caused his refusal to commend the church. The word translated “factions” (*haireseis*) is regarded by Bruce (109) as a synonym of the word translated “divisions” (*schismata*) in v. 18. Bengel (228) regards this difference: “*schism* is a mutual separation; *heresy* is the separation of one party from the unity of the Church, either in faith or worship.” Ellicott (211) thinks it refers to “parties into which the Corinthian Church-life was tending to crystallize.”

Schlier (183) advances the following:

*hairesis* indicates something more serious. The greater seriousness consists in the fact that *haireseis* affect the foundation of the Church in doctrine, and that they do so in such a fundamental way as to give rise to a new society alongside the *ekklesia*. This the Church cannot accept, since as the lawful public assembly of the whole people of God the Church embraces this people exclusively and comprehensively. If the Church accedes to *haireseis*, it will destroy its comprehensive claim.

Which ever meaning best fits Paul’s original meaning, this

much is crystal clear: The formation of these “factions” will demonstrate the difference between those who are “the approved ones” (*hoi dokimoi*) and those who are not. “The approved ones” will not be part of the party-perversions because they “have passed satisfactorily through the test and are thus proved to be genuine. This suggests that not all the church-members had thus approved themselves to God. There is no severer-type test of loyalty to Christ than the existence around us of church-parties. They who in such circumstances behave aright are *evidently approved*” (Ellicott, 190).

V. 20: “Therefore, when you are coming together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper”

When this verse is tied to v. 21, their purpose in coming together was a twofold negative: not to eat the Lord’s Supper and the careless eating of the meal prior to the Lord’s Supper constituted a blatant abortion of both. That is, their “divisions” and “factions” were anchored in utter selfishness and made any spiritual association of communion with the Lord and joint-participation with one another a sheer impossibility.

This is the only place in the NT where the expression “Lord’s Supper” (*kuriakon deipnon*) occurs. It was designed to be a meaningful symbolic communion with the Lord and fellow Christians. They, however, had ruined its meaning altogether. It was “profaned by faction as certainly as by idolatry” (Bruce, 110). They had turned it into a mere “social and festive character” like any other club [and] “a feast of contribution, to which each brought his own provision” (Vincent, 249).

V. 21: “for each one begins eating his own supper first before others do, and one is getting hungry and one is getting drunk”

The bursting or explosion of the Lord’s Supper was intimately connected with their own meal prior to the Supper. As Blomberg (229) notes: “Instead of sharing in a kind of ‘potluck’ and ensuring that all get plenty to eat and drink, some gorge themselves and get drunk at the expense of those who come later or have less.”

What was supposed to be a meal in which respect and concern for others was shared “together” rather than “each one eating his own supper first before others do” signaled the message that some were important and others were not. The wealthy

smiled with arrogance over their abundance, and the poor were thereby shamed and humiliated over their lack. The end result of this disrespectful conduct was that some remained hungry and others became drunk. So, this latter consequence reveals the kind of wine which was used by the wealthy.

The ugliness of these extremes and abuses is further highlighted in v. 22. The broken-heartedness of Paul is couched in the form of questions designed to drive home his point to motivate them to repent. After all, “such disgusting conduct was considered shameful [even] in heathen club suppers” (Robertson, 163). Surely, they are capable of better!

V. 22: “For it is not that you do not have houses [in which] to eat and drink [is it]? Or are you treating the church of God with contempt, even humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you? In this I will not commend you”

These are a series of “emphatic, and almost indignant questions” (Ellicott, 213). Surely, they have houses of their own in which to eat and drink as they please. Yet, in the supposed-to-be solemn meeting or assembling of the church of God, their selfish behavior demonstrated lack of reverence for God and His church. That is, there was no reverence for the worship of God, along with a despicable treatment of the poor in the church. They were failing to recognize the presence of the Lord both in and among these poor but, nevertheless, fellow believers.

In 1:12-13, “Paul had accused them of dismembering the body of Christ by their factions over leaders. They were doing the same thing when they acted selfishly at the love feasts. By disregarding the needs of the poor brothers, they were actually despising the church of God” (Dean, 116).

Paul is bewildered by their actions. He is “expressing horror at their sacrilege of the church of God” (Robertson, 164). No wonder he said that he will not commend them!

V. 23: “For I received from the Lord, what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread”

The gospels and letters in the NT are not arranged according to a chronological framework as to when they were written. In fact, 1 Corinthians was likely written before any of the gospel

records. If so, then we have in verses 23-25, the first recorded words of Jesus about the beginning of this Supper. If so, then this is the oldest account of its beginning or origin. If so, then Paul here offers the remedy for the abusive treatment of the Lord's Supper and does so by "direct claim to revelation from the Lord Jesus on the origin of the Lord's Supper" (Robertson, 164). So, he here rehearses and relays to the Corinthians what the Lord Himself relayed to him. The details are practically identical with Luke's account (22:17-20). Those details are stated to show the miserable manner in which the Corinthians had celebrated – or more correctly, mis-celebrated – it.

V. 24: "and after having given thanks He broke and said, 'This is My body which is for you. Keep on doing this in remembrance of Me'"

V. 25: "In the same way also after supper [He took] the cup saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; Keep on doing this, as often as you may drink it, in remembrance of Me'"

V. 26: "For as often as you may eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord until He comes."

The words "as often as" indicates that there is not any scripturally specified frequency as to when this Supper is to occur. It just means that it is to be done "perpetually" (Findlay, 881) or continuously.

The greatest preachers of the gospel are those who participate in this commemorative communion with the Lord and one another until the final coming of Jesus Christ.

The words "until He comes" (*achris hou elthe*) are added which "increases the solemnity with which the apostles seeks to invest it" (Gould, 100).

V. 27: "Therefore, whoever may eat this bread and drink this cup in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord"

Even though the precise moments for observing this commemorative communion are not stated, the manner is. The "unworthy manner" (*anaxios*) is seen and identified in the behaviors of the Corinthians noted above (vs. 20-22). That is, when one does not "act out of love for the fellowship of the church, also when he is insensitive to the presence of Christ, ungrateful for



his sacrificial death, and irresponsible to the meaning of his redemption” (Brown, 359).

To be “guilty of the body and of the blood of our Lord” may manifest one’s role in the crucifixion of Christ, that he does not have faith in or commitment to Christ. With this understanding, the one who plays a role in the crucifixion of Christ is clearly one who refuses to confess Him as the Son of God in the flesh, whose redemptive mission in His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension are simply folly to him.

V. 28: “But a man must examine himself and in this way he must eat of the break and drink of the cup”

The self-examination is “specially directed to ascertaining whether or not he is living and acting ‘in love and charity’ with his neighbors” (Bruce, 115).

V. 29: “for the one who is eating and drinking is eating and drinking judgment against himself by not recognizing the body”

He/she does so by partaking of the Lord’s Supper in the unworthy manner noted above. That is, “any one who approaches the Lord’s Supper in a spirit of levity or defiance, not discriminating between it and common food, draws on himself, by so eating and drinking, a judgment which is defined in the next verse” (Farrar, 365).

V. 30: “For this reason many among you [are] weak and sick and some have fallen asleep”

As Beet (197) notes, “the severity of the punishments proves how great this sin was.”

The word “have fallen asleep” (*koimontai*) is a euphemism for physical death.

Lenski’s (484) words are necessary: “Paul does not say that the penalty of this [unworthy manner] is invariably physical sickness or untimely death. The Lord alone decides what the penalty shall be. [But] in Corinth the penalty is as Paul states it.”

V. 31: “But if we are examining ourselves, we are not being judged”

There are two different words translated “judging and judged” (*diekrinomen – ekrinometha*). The first denotes the judgment of “self-examination and knowledge [which] leads to more intelligent and Christian conduct” Gould, 101). The second denotes the judgment of God, as manifested in v. 30.

V. 32: “But while we are being judged we are being disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned together with the world”

Here the Lord’s judgment is set forth as a disciplinary matter. The weakness and sickness are misfortunes, for sure. But “these misfortunes are sent not to destroy them but to discipline them and to bring them back to the right way” (Barclay, 105). That is, these misfortunes or “afflictions are meant to separate us from the doom of the wicked world” (Robertson, 166).

V. 33: “So then, my fellow Christians, while you are coming together to eat, you must wait in turn for another”

So, when they “are coming together to eat” the meal prior to the Lord’s Supper, as well as the Supper itself, they are to exercise common courtesy by waiting on the arrival of others. “If they do not, [they] will fail miserably to show the true meaning of remembering Jesus” (Brown, 360).

After all, “by their indecent haste, each eating his own meal without waiting for the rest, they had turned the Supper from its memorial purposes into an ordinary and insignificant meal, a mere eating and drinking” (Gould, 102).

The words of Brown (360) ring truly and loudly again: “It is a grievous impoverishment of the Lord’s Supper that interprets it as ‘only a memorial.’”

V. 34: “If someone is hungry he must eat at home, in order that you may not come together for judgment. And the other concerns I myself will arrange in order when I come”

Paul’s remedy is simple enough: If you are hungry, then eat before you leave home. This is the way to avoid judgment. “Otherwise, the Lord’s Supper will not strengthen him spiritually but will condemn him both spiritually and physically because

the Lord's Supper means a great deal more than the satisfaction of the appetite" (Ibid.).

When Paul arrives in person, he will then address "the other concerns" he does not have time or space to mention in this letter. So, the Lord's Supper is "a commemoration of the Cross and Resurrection, the crucial events in God's victory in the past. [Also] it is a partnership [with other Christians and] with the living Lord who is now the host of his table [in the present]. [Plus] it looks forward to the final victory of Christ when he comes [again]" (Craig, 145).

## 2. Positives (12:1-14:40)

For an impressive expose of weaving together Paul's perspectives on spiritual gifts, see Bert Dominy's coverage in the *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, Editor-in-Chief Russell H. Dilday, pgs. 49-68

Another brief writing about how to use your spiritual gifts is Barbara Joiner's, *Yours For the Giving: Spiritual Gifts*.

My own presentation of perspectives on spiritual gifts is on my website: [archive.org/details/@mandm313](http://archive.org/details/@mandm313) and is entitled "Spiritual Gifts: The Biblical Recipe for Church Functioning and Growth."

### a. Spiritual Gifts - Part I (12:1-31)

This section touches on the significance of spiritual gifts and their value for the functioning and growth of the Church which is the Body of Christ with many different members, each of whom is gifted by God for the benefit of all.

This overview of this part of the letter provides valuable perspectives on its content: Vs. 1-2: Introductory statements about spiritual gifts; Vs. 3: The possession of the Spirit is what makes possible the acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord. Vs. 4-6: The manifestations of the spiritual gifts are diverse but united in one God; Vs. 7: Each Christian has been give a spiritual gift for the benefit of the whole Church body; Vs. 8-10: Specific mention of the various gifts; Vs. 11: It is the Spirit of God Who determines the distribution of spiritual gifts; Vs. 12-30: The analogy of the human body finds critical variables for the spiritual body of the Church; Vs. 31: The desire for the greater or spiritual gifts is to be heartily and zealously pursued. He specifies the motive and manner in which this is to be done.

V. 1: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, fellow Christians, I do not want you to be without information"

This represents a new subject for which Paul desired to share pertinent information. It may be the result of one of the questions which the church had posed to Paul in the missing letter. To say that he does not want the church “to be without information” indicates that Paul “wishes very definitely that the congregation shall know” (Grosheide, 279) about this matter of spiritual gifts.

V. 2: “You know that when you were pagans you were being led astray repeatedly by those who could not speak”

In their pre-Christian days, his readers were repeatedly or frequently “being led astray” as they gave themselves up “to any guidance whatever” (Bengel, 233) from these idols “who could not speak.” Indeed, as Morris (167) notes: “There is something pathetic about idol worship. *Dumb idols* [KJV] characterizes their duties as totally unable to answer those who call upon them. They could give no revelation. They could make nothing known to their worshippers.”

The two words *hos an* carry the idea of “repetition” (Robertson, 974) or “repeatedly” as here translated. Moulton (167) notes that this is one of only two other occurrences of this word in the NT “in which the old *iterative* force seems to survive (Acts 2:45; 4:35) – ‘as you *would* be led (from day to day).’”

How more absurd could these Corinthians be? How could they have any degree of confidence or even sensibilities for their worship and daily activities since they were being led and thus following these “dumb deities” (Morris, 167).

V. 3: “Therefore, I am making known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God can say, ‘Jesus is accursed’ and that no one is able to say, ‘Jesus [is] Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit”

Apparently in response to another question from the Corinthians, Paul declares that the single way to differentiate Christians from non-Christians is by their responsive position and proclamation about Jesus. For example, “we know that the opposition he encountered from some of the Jews of the synagogue was exceedingly bitter. They hated the Christian church and its founder. To them it was rank blasphemy to proclaim Jesus as divine. For them the curse lay heavy on all who had been hanged on a cross” (Short, 149).

To say that He was “accursed,” meant that He deserved what He

got and that He did so because He was a fake, a real imposter. Paul declares that the Spirit of God would never “lead” someone to that statement. On the contrary, the Spirit of God would “lead” them to say that “Jesus is Lord.” This would not be a one-time confession but a lifetime and/or lifestyle confession in both words and conduct.

Indeed, Paul’s statement “involved a strong rebuke to those who professed a profound spiritual insight, to tell them that no man could make the simple, humble confession of the divinity of Jesus ( for “Lord” is here an equivalent of the Hebrew ‘Jehovah’) except by the same inspiration as that which they so terribly abused” (Farrar, 397).

#### V. 4: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit”

Paul uses the word “varieties” (*diakresis*) in this verse and verses 5-6 in denoting the “differences” and “*allotments of spiritual gifts*” (BAG, 182) to fellow Christians. These are the only occurrences of this word in the NT. So, there was no single gift which all of them had , and there was no need for any of them to conclude that their own gift was sufficient in and of itself, and, therefore, no need for a sense of superiority over others.

After all, it was the same Spirit Who distributed these variously flavored gifts to whomever He decided. That is, “instead of giving to one man the whole round of the capacities which His favour prompts Him to bestow, the One Spirit Who dwells in all believers gives different capacities to different men” (Beet, 214). It was “a favour bestowed or received without any merit” (Robertson, 168).

#### V. 5: “And there are varieties of ministries, but the same Lord”

The word translated “ministries” (*diakonia*) is from the word “deacon, servant” (*diakonos*) and conveys the idea of “service, contribution, support, help.” As MacArthur (291) reminds us: “Even Christians with the same basic gift may be led to manifest that gift in many different ways” – teaching children, biblical languages, witnessing, exhortation, etc.: “varieties” is the key!

“The same Lord” points to Jesus (v. 3).

#### V. 6: “And there are varieties of workings, but the same God Who is working all things in all [people]”

The noun “workings” (*energmaton*) is followed by the verb “working” (*energon*) in relation to God the Father Who, as “the Energy and the Energizer of the Universe” (Robertson, 168), is concerned not only with spiritual gifts but also “all things” (*ta panta*) in the universe.

To say that God is working “in all” (*en pasin*) means “all the gifts in all who are gifted” (Alford, 577). They “are regarded collectively” (Vincent, 256).

So, here, in relation to spiritual gifts, verses 4-6 reveal that it is none other than the Trinity totally and completely involved in the divine mission on this planet..

V. 7: “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”

“The manifestation of the Spirit” refers to each individual gift which the Spirit gives and the gift itself reveals or manifests that it was given by the Spirit for every Christian and their “mutual benefit” (Findlay, 877).

Indeed, the gifts are given to each one individually but they “are not for rivalry and jealousy” (Morris, 170). After all, “the particular gift which a person receives is not of his own choosing but is determined by the Spirit. Hence, there can be no ground for pride in respect to what is entirely a matter of grace” (Craig, 151). Rather, they are for “the common good” of all in the church; they are profitable for all when they are used for the edification of all in the church.

V. 8: “For to one is given [the] word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another [the] word of knowledge by the same Spirit”

1. In the NT, “wisdom” refers to God’s divine plan of providing salvation for human beings through the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Paul makes this emphatic in chapters 1 and 2 of this letter. In brief, “wisdom refers to the significance of the cross” (Brown, 362) and its parameters. But the gift here is not *wisdom* but “the word of wisdom.” In other words, *the word* or *utterance* of wisdom indicates or points to the Spirit-inspired “ability to discourse [or speak] eloquently of this wisdom” (Berquist, 93).

Notice that this gift is “through the Spirit.” It is only “through the Spirit” that we are able “not only to apprehend [understand] this wisdom in our own hearts for our own salvation but also to convey what we have apprehended to others for their salvation”

(Lenski, 500).

2. The gift of “the word of knowledge” is “the ability to impart this knowledge [of the details of the gospel] to others” (Lenski, 501). In other words, this gift “clearly expounds and applies” (Cremer, 873) “the word of wisdom.” This gift is the special capacity and capability “according to the same Spirit” to teach and inform believers or disciples how to make “practical application of gospel truths in their own individual lives” (Berquist, 92).

In other words, the one with this gift is able “to search, systematize, and summarize” the teachings of Scripture. And upon the basis of this knowledge, this special “insight or illumination” (Robertson, 169) of divine truth, the one with this gift is enabled to dispense this knowledge to others. He is called upon by God to do so.

Now, this latter gift is not restricted to preachers or “professional clergyman” (Flynn, 92). So, non-preachers should keep the door or window of possibility open: God may have graced *you* with this gift.

V. 9: “to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healings by the One Spirit”

3. Paul is not speaking here of the saving faith which is basic to the *beginning* of the Christian life, but of extraordinary faith which renders special service *within* the Christian life” (Bruce, 119).

This gift may be regarded as the *heroic belief* embodied in faith as a gift which has a sense of stubbornness about it; an unconquerable “assurance that God can overcome any difficulties, and meet any emergencies” (Berquist, 92) which may be encountered. This kind of faith “laughs at impossibilities and cries, ‘It shall be done’” (Flynn, 141). This is the faith which “moves mountains” (Brown, 363; Farrar, 398) and “produces results” (Barclay, 109).

Blomberg (244), however, adds this additional perspective on this gift: it may also refer to “a special measure of faith . . . to sustain a person when [God] chooses not to work” such impossibilities.

4. The two words “gifts of healings” are both in the plural. This appears to mean that there is a separate, distinct gift of healing with each kind of illness. In other words, there is one gift for healings or cures *without* medical interventions, one gift for cures or healings *with* medical interventions, and one gift for

cures or healings with natural remedies.

Blomberg (244) claims that “the plurals suggest that the gift may come and go for various occasions or, perhaps more likely, that there are different gifts for different kinds of illnesses.”

Both Morris (169) and Grosheide (286) agree.

Farrar (398), however, maintains that reference is to healings by supernatural powers and not by medical knowledge.

V. 10: “to another the workings of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another distinguishing of spirits, and to another kinds of tongues and to another interpretation of tongues”

5. The “workings of miracles” consists also of two plurals. It refers to “works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means” (Vines, 757).

As Flynn (162) notes, “a miracle is God stepping into His universe [and] setting aside the ordinary laws of nature to do something extraordinary.”

Since this gift is “mentioned immediately after healings . . . miraculous cures are not meant. Jesus did miracles other than healings (stilling of the storm, feeding of the multitudes)” (Morris, 171).

Barclay (111) states that the inclusion of demon-exorcism is almost certain:

In those [NT] days many illnesses, often all illnesses, especially mental illnesses, were attributed to the work of demons; and it was one of the functions of the church to exorcise these demons. . . . Exorcism is still very much a reality in the mission field; and at all times it is the function of the church to minister to a mind diseased and disturbed.

6. The gift of “prophecy” has been regarded as “chief of the gifts” (Bengel, 138). It means “to speak for God” (Barnhouse, 48). It refers to “the function of communicating revelations of truth from God” (Bruce, 122). It is the inspired and inspiring utterance or declaration of divine Scripture through human lips. Primary emphasis, therefore, is on the *forth* telling of the Word of God *in* the present, *by* the prophet, *for* the present. Prophecy is the declaration and delivery of *Scripture* – not man’s speculations or conjectures or opinions or ideas or inferences, but of *Scripture*. It is an emphatic, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’



7. The “distinguishing of spirits” is “the counterpart and safeguard of ‘prophesying’” (Findlay, 888). It refers to the ability to “distinguish between different kinds of spirits, and to determine whether, in any case, it is the Spirit of God by which a man speaks, or only his human spirit, or even an evil spirit” (Gould, 105).

According to 1 John 4:1, all Christians are to “prove/test/examine (*dokimazo*) the spirits whether it is from God.” However, there may arise certain cases when it is difficult to “distinguish” (*diakrisis*) between different kinds of spirits. “There were [then, and are now] such things as ‘deceitful spirits’ which [speak] doctrines of devils’ (1 Timothy 4:1; Rev. 2:1-2)” (Farrar, 398). It is the very nature of false prophets to use language that is both destructive and damaging to the unsuspecting and less sensitive. They thrive on it. And so, “for the purpose of unmasking these prophets, the Lord provides this gift and thus enables His church to turn from lying spirits to the one Spirit of truth” (Lenski, 504).

As Brown, 363) observes: “Persons who distinguish between spirits possess spiritual sensitivity and maturity. They know how to assess properly the place of mind, will, and emotion in religious experience.”

8. “Kinds of tongues and interpretation of tongues” are two gifts which function in conjunction with one another. More needs to be said than will be said in this commentary. I, therefore, refer readers to a book co-authored by Drs. Fisher Humphreys and Malcolm Tolbert: *Speaking in Tongues*. I will simply make a few observations from a general standpoint: 1. Speaking in tongues is a legitimate spiritual gift in the NT. 2. There were different varieties or kinds of this gift. 3. The kind spoken at Corinth was beneficial to none except the one speaking, unless an interpreter was present to unveil its meaning. 4. At Corinth, the gift was overvalued. It was a source of both pride and perplexity. 5. Paul minimizes the importance of this gift and says that if an interpreter is not available, it should be exercised in private, not in public. 6. Paul never questioned the reality of this gift. He was, however, very much concerned about its usage and potential dangers. 7. We must exercise love and tolerance with Christian brothers and sisters as we seek to come to an adequate and accurate understanding of this gift.

V. 11: “And one and the same Spirit works all these things by distributing to each person as He desires”

This is a summary statement of vs. 4-7. It is the Holy Spirit Who not only produces “these things” (i.e. “gifts”) but also provides the energy by which they operate and/or function. It may be easy to forget or not realize that in the Spirit’s distribution of the gifts, He “never ignores the make-up, characteristics, age, position, and other particular features of a person. The gifts fit the man” (Lenski, 511-512).

Plus, since it is the Spirit Who determines what He distributes, there should be no room for complaining, rivalry, jealousy, or boasting among the various recipients of these various gifts. To be guilty of any of these is a marked insult to the Spirit Who gives them. Seemingly, some of the Corinthians had become experts in such insulting phenomena.

V. 12: “For just as the body is one and yet has many body parts, so the body is one with all the body parts, and Christ is like this”

This, of course, is comparing the human body with the body of Christ, the Church. The human body is made up of many different parts with many different functions, yet they all work together for the overall good of that body. In other words, there is unity in diversity. And such diversity is a major plus rather than a minus.

As Paul will elaborate in verses 14-26, just as there is the absence of conflict between the various parts of the human body, the same principle applies to the Church body.

So, here, in the diversity of gifts given by the Holy Spirit to those in the Church, there is unity in diversity.

V. 13: “For by One Spirit we all have been baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, even all having been immersed by one Spirit [into one body]”

This unity in diversity is seen in how the Holy Spirit operates upon and within the Church body. “All” Christians “have been baptized” (*ebaptisthemen* – from *bapto* = “to dip in or under”) or “immersed” or “placed in” the spiritual body of Christ – the Church. Apart from this *placement* work of the Spirit, no one is a part of the body: i.e., regardless of one’s nationality (“Jews or Greeks”) or social standing (“slaves or free”).

The translations “made to drink into one Spirit” (KJV) or “made to drink of one Spirit” (NAS) or “were imbued with one Spirit” (Williams) or “one Spirit was poured out for all of us to drink” (Beck) are all appropriate. However, The American Bible Union

Version (ABUV – John Broadus) is preferred: “by one Spirit we were all immersed into one body,” thus reflecting the above translation.

As Oepke points out, this action of or by the Spirit is indicative of “the possession of the Spirit” (539) and one’s “incorporation into the body of Christ” (541).

V. 14: “For the body is not one part but many”

In keeping with the analogy, the human body is not made up of any one or single part. Despite the various parts of the body, there is a wholeness and/or wholesomeness as each part recognizes its need of the other parts. The human body would not be what it is and could not function as it does without this diversity. Again, Paul elaborates his point with specifics in verses 15-26.

V. 15: “And if the foot may say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ it is not because of [saying] this not of the body is it?”

V. 16: “And if the ear may say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ it is not because of [saying] this not of the body is it?”

V. 17: “And if the entire body [was] an eye, where the hearing?”

V. 18: “But now God has placed the parts, each one of them in the body just as He desired.”

The fact that God is the One Who so “placed these parts” according to His own desires, and did so with each part complementing rather than clashing with each other exists to promote “harmony” within the body. He continues:

V. 19: “And if all the parts were one part, where the body?”

V. 20: “But now [there are] many parts, but one body”

V. 21: “And the eye is not able to say to the hand, ‘I do not have need of you,’ or again the head [is not able to say] to the feet, ‘I do not have need of you’”

V. 22: “Rather, by much more the many parts of the body seeming to be weaker are urgently necessary”

V. 23: “And what we think to be unattractive parts of the body on these we invest with honor, and our private body parts which have no decency have more abundant decency”

V. 24: “and our more presentable part of the body have no need of decency”

All of “the many parts of the body” – whether visible or invisible, exposed or covered – are absolutely essential, vital, or necessary for the body’s operation or functioning.

V. 25: “in order that there may be no disharmony in the body but the parts may have the same care for one another”

V. 26: “And if one part may suffer, all the parts suffer with it”

This unity in diversity is an impressive display of appropriate functioning and operation as seen in how one part of the body helps another part of the body even when suffering of that part is in motion. “The body cares for every member and shares all the weal [“well-being”] and woe of every member” (Brown, 366).

V. 27: “And you are [the] body of Christ and members of one another”

What is true of the human body is also true of the spiritual body of Christ. All parts are there to function in conjunction with other parts – and their respective roles in relation to spiritual gifts. Jealousies, comparisons, conflicts, competitions, arguments, and any other forms of discords, distractions, and divisions are to be aborted. It is one for all and all for one.

With this analogy being completed, the picture should be easy for one’s focus: “how natural and right is the proper use of our gifts in harmony with the other members of the body, and, by contrast, how unnatural and wrong are all thoughts and actions that are in conflict with that harmony” (Lenski, 534).

With this, therefore, Paul provides a brief recapitulation and/or reminder of some of those gifts – a signaled occasion for deserved appreciation and appropriation

V. 28: “And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues”

9. The gift of “apostles” has both a primary and a secondary usage. The word itself is found 79 times in the NT. In the stricter, primary sense, the term refers to the original apostles, Paul himself being included. It denotes specially called and commissioned messengers who were given the life-long task of carrying out the purpose of God for man’s salvation (Shepherd, 171).

In the secondary sense, though, the word may also apply to any “who proclaim the Word today” (Wuest, 100). We may not have the apostles before us in the flesh today, but we can be *apostolic* by turning to the message of the apostles and following their example in our preaching, teaching, and living. But it must be the Word of God. Only to the degree that we also are called by Christ and are echoing what they have already said may the word “apostle” apply to anyone today.

10. The gift of “teachers” involves, of course, one who is endowed with insight and skills in setting forth the details and facts of God’s Word. In our superficial society which is basically opposed to serious and extended “thinking,” the need for one who clearly explains the meaning of God’s Word can all too easily be overlooked or ignored.

So, the one with this gift is concerned with digging a little deeper and going beyond the surface of scripture, thereby giving God’s people an organized, structured presentation of His truths. The gift of “prophecy” or the forthtelling of the Word of God is always urgent. But with equal desperateness it needs to be accurately and adequately *explained*, not just *proclaimed*.

Barclay (161) says, “It may well be that one of the great failures of the Church at the present time is just in this realm.”

Barnhouse (48) says, “such a gift exacts much study and consumes much time over the course of years. The man who has the ability to teach should exercise it and stick to it.” A. T. Robertson (174) adds, “It is a calamity when the preacher is no longer a teacher, but only an exhorter.”

The gifts of “miracles” were addressed in v. 10 and “healings” in v. 9.

11. The gift of “helps” (*antilempseis*) is a noun found here only in the NT. It refers to the gift of giving assistance or lending a hand to those who need help: the poor, the weak, the sick, orphans, widows, strangers, and so forth. It is the unburdening of the burdened ones.

The verb form of this noun is found in Lk. 10:40 where an ex-

hausted and exasperated Martha asked Jesus, “Do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone. Bid her, therefore, that she *help* me.” No miraculous expectations are included in this word. It simply includes taking one’s turn at serving “joyfully and diligently wherever and whenever required” (Flynn, 101). While it is not a glamorous gift and does not demand attention, it is highly prized by Him Who gave it. It, therefore, should be prized and faithfully performed by those who have it (MacArthur, 324).

Christianity is, and always has been, intensely concerned with active and practical concerns in meeting human needs. This gift of “helps” is “the activity of love” (Delling, 376) practically demonstrated by lending a hand of help to the hurting.

12. The gift of “administrations” (*kuberneseis*) occurs here only in the NT. It is variously translated “government” (KJV), “organizers” (Phillips; the Message), “administering” (New Berkeley Version), and “managers” (Williams).

The idea behind this word is that of a steersman or helmsman who directs a ship or keeps it on its proper destination (Vincent, 260; Howard, 111; Brown, 368; Bruce, 123). It refers to those who shoulder the administrative affairs of the church: those who direct the church’s life; those gifted ones who are charged by God with the task of keeping the church on course, on its proper goal and destination.

Pastors may or may not have this gift, but it is certainly not restricted to them. Pastors may or may not have this gift, or they may have it in varying degrees of skillfulness and effectiveness. But as anyone who has been involved in church life knows well, there clearly are those people in the church who are definitely endowed with this leadership ability. Their role as recipients of this gifts should be recognized and allowed to be exercised.

As Barclay (115) so wisely informs or reminds us, “there are those [with this gift] who serve the Church in ways that win no publicity, but without whose service the Church could not go on.”

God not only knows *what* He wants done in His Church but also knows *how* to get it done. As His people recognize and respond obediently in the exercise of their gifts, both the individual Christian and the Church corporately *function* appropriately and *grow* according to God’s yardstick or measuring rod. It is to be tearfully admitted that much that is called church function and growth is neither!

V. 29: “All are not apostles are they? All are not prophets are they? All are not teachers are they? All are not miracle workers are they?”

V. 30: “All do not have gifts of healings do they? All do not speak with tongues do they? “All do not interpret do they?”

All of these questions are prefaced by the negative particle *me* which expects the answer “no.”

V. 31a: “But ye [plural: all of you] must keep on seeking more earnestly the greater gifts”

As noted in the above translation, the imperative verb “ye must keep on seeking” is in the plural, denoting what “all of his readers” must keep on seeking. This verb (*zeloute*) means “seeking zealously, more earnestly.” In other words, do not discount or minimize the importance of these spiritual gifts. This seeking is not for one’s own benefit or fulfillment of one’s personal ambitions. It is for the benefit of the entire Church body.

This object of this “seeking” is “the greater gifts” ( *ta charismata ta meizona*) which is simply another way to refer to or describe the *spiritual gifts* he has been talking about in this chapter. All of them together are “greater gifts.” To imply that there “is” some spiritual gift which is superior to the others goes against everything he has been saying.

In fact, the word “greater” (*meizona*) is used as a superlative and occurs as such here only in the NT. These spiritual gifts are, indeed, superior to any other kinds of gifts in the world because they carry eternal consequences in fulfilling eternal purposes. As Blomberg (256) observes: “In an age of increasing specialization in careers and knowledge more generally, it becomes all the more crucial for Christians to view spiritual gifts as broadly as possible.” Barclay (108-109) does so:

all spiritual gifts come from God and it is [Paul’s] belief that they must, therefore, be used in God’s service. The fault of the Church, in modern times, at least, is that it has interpreted the idea of special gifts far too narrowly. It has too often acted on the apparent assumption that the special gifts which it can use consist of things like speaking, praying, teaching, writing – the more or less intellectual gifts. It would be well if the Church would realize

that the gifts of the man who can work with his hands, are just as special gifts from God. The mason, the carpenter, the electrician, the painter, the engineer, the plumber all have their special gifts, which are from God and can be used for him.

Blomberg's (256-257) follow-up remarks also merit notice:

we must beware of continuing to play down the significance of the 'behind the scenes' people. Ours is an age that delights to exalt Christian celebrities, to demand that our pastors entertain, have charismatic personalities, and display more spiritual gifts than any one Bible character ever had! Little wonder that burn-out from full-time ministry seems to be at an all-time high and that moral failure often results from the stress.

So, in concert with the collective nature of these gifts, and their benefits for the entire church, without anyone's individual gift being better than others, all Christians are to be recognizing and encouraging one another to use their gifts for the benefit of all. Again, this understanding falls completely within the parameters of the human body analogy Paul is using.

V. 31b: "And I show to you a way which surpasses all others"

The "way" to keep on seeking these spiritual gifts for the good of the entire church body revolves around the how? or the motive and manner in which this "seeking more earnestly" transpires. It is the way of "love" which Paul will particularize in ch. 13: it is devoid of selfishness, cruelty, competition, pride, complacency, etc. So, Paul will speak clearly in this regard. As Lenski (543) notes:

The sense is not that this exceedingly excellent way is to be sought in place of the gifts, as a substitute for them. The idea expressed is not that 'love' is more excellent than gifts. This [idea would introduce] a false contrast and would call for an adversative connective, namely *de* or *alla* in place of Paul's *kai* and *eti*. Nor does Paul elaborate the thesis that love is prefer-



able to gifts. In 14:1 he urges us to seek both.  
[Here, however] Love is to be the all-dominating motive in seeking and in using spiritual gifts.

Remember: love is not a *spiritual gift* which is distributed by the Spirit to “some” in the Church but the *fruit* of the Spirit for “all” in the Church. Indeed, love is that which the Spirit gives to “one and all” in the body of Christ. It is the *modus operandi* [“method or manner of working”] for Church functioning and growth in terms of the exercise of spiritual gifts and every other facet of the Christian faith.

b. Supreme Glory (13:13)

This section touches on the supreme motive and manner in which and by which these spiritual gifts are to be zealously pursued by the entire church body. Having revealed, by the human body analogy, the absolute purpose and connection of the cited spiritual gifts with and for the church body, “unless motivated and undergirded by love” (Berquist, 100), they fail to achieve their God-ordained purpose and connection. He notes the specific features or traits by which love is manifested in the collective interactions of the church with one another as they function and grow in accordance with and by the respectful appreciation each Christian has for the spiritual gifts of others in the church. Without this motivating principle, the manner by which the gifts are carried out will be absolutely worthless.

This overview of this part of the letter provides valuable perspectives on its content: Vs. 1-3: Without the selfless, sacrificial, solemn, steady type of love (*agape*), the spiritual gifts are void of meaningfulness; Vs. 4-8a: Paul uses sixteen present tense verbs by which to portray this love in action; Vs. 8b-13: Paul pinpoints the permanent nature of this love.

V. 1: “For if I am speaking the words of men and of angels, and do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a loud clanging cymbal”

The word “if” (*ean*) begins a third class clause which indicates a possible, expectant, or supposedly forthcoming action. This action is described as “speaking the words of men and of angels.” The verb “I am speaking” indicates the verbal display by which *he himself* is setting forth some significant statements of truth, or

an *editorial use* such as anyone who would be speaking.

The mention of “men” denotes, more specifically, the range of such “speaking” and “the words” (*glossa* = “languages, utterances, tongues, words”) being used by men who are engaged in preaching and teaching. It may refer to a superior form or style of communicating (like Apollos). If it is here used in reference to “tongues” (v. 10, 30), it would denote the spiritual gift by which the gospel would be communicated (Acts 2:3-4, 11; 10:46; 19:6) through the tongues/mouths of men.

The mention of “angels” may refer to “the Corinthians’ estimation of this gift” (Blomberg, 259), or as the angels actually speak while in heaven. So, whether from the standpoint of earth or heaven, any tongues, utterances, speeches, or languages are utterly worthless if not motivated by selfless, sacrificial, solemn, steady type of love (*agape*).

V. 2: “And if I have the gift of preaching the message of God and know all mysteries and have all knowledge and if I have all faith so to remove all mountains, but not have love, I am nothing”

On earth particularly, “the gift of preaching the message of God, knowing all mysteries, having all knowledge and all faith” would likewise be utterly worthless if not motivated by selfless, sacrificial, solemn, steady type of love (*agape*).

These particulars are previously mentioned: “prophecy” (12:10); “mysteries” (2:7; 4:1); “knowledge” (1:5; 8:1 [twice], 7, 10, 11; 12:8); “faith” (2:5; 12:9 – miracle-working faith, not saving faith).

No matter how spectacular they may be, or how powerful and impressive they may be, apart from the motivation of the *agape* kind of love, the person who exercises them is “an absolute zero” (Robertson, 177).

V. 3: “And if I may give all my possessions and if I give my body to be burned, but do not have love, it is being useful for nothing”

Even the apparently *sacrificial actions* of giving away all of my possessions [to the poor and needy] and my very body to be burned in martyrdom are also “useful for nothing” unless such actions are bathed in *agape* type love – truly selfless, sacrificial, solemn, and steady love, indeed, and in deed. However, Findlay (898) states “that those who make sacrifices

to benefit others *without* love, must have some hidden, selfish recompense that they count upon.”

Vincent (263-264) notes that a motive other than love did occur: “martydom for the sake of ambition was a fact of early occurrence in the Church.” In his *Lives of the Fathers*. F W. Farrar (207-208) sadly notes:

Both at this time and in the persecution of Diocletian, there were Christians who, oppressed by debt, by misery, and sometimes even by a sense of guilt, thrust themselves into the glory and imagined redemptiveness of the baptism of blood. . . . there were some of the confessors who were puffed up with vanity and pride, and seemed to think that the blood of martyrdom would avail them to wash away the stains of flagrant and even recent immoralities.

V. 4: “Love waits patiently, love practices kindness, does not practice jealousy, [love] does not practice conceitedness, does not practice arrogance”

Again, verses 4-8a employ sixteen present tense verbs to depict what love looks like in action. Love:

1. “waits patiently” (*makrothumei*) means “patient towards injurious or provoking persons; patience in respect of adverse and afflictive *circumstances*” (Findlay, 899); “passively it endures evils” (Farrar, 424). Gould (112) notes: “it is not quickly excited to anger or passion; is patient under provocation.”
2. “practices kindness” (*chresteuetai*) means “one who renders gracious, well-disposed service to others” (Ibid); “good, gentleness, sweetness has seized more successfully the central notion of the word” (Trench, 232-233); “actively it does good; it confers blessings” (Farrar, 424). Love is “mild and benignant in spirit” (Gould, 112). The word occurs here only in the NT.
3. “does not practice jealousy” (*ou zeloi*) means it does not “boil” over in a negative way. In the eagerness of the Corinthians to have the best of the spiritual gifts, they had forgotten that love does not practice this combative enviousness. This is “a tacit rebuke of the spirit of envy and self-conceit, shown by the Corinthians in regard to the charismata possessed by them” (Gould, 112).

4. “does not practice conceitedness” (*ou perpereuetai*) indicates there is no “empty bragging” (Bruce, 126). This word occurs here only in the NT and denotes it does not “play the braggart” (Robertson, 178). It refers to one who does not sound “his own praises” (Vincent, 264).

5. “does not practice arrogance” (*ou phusioutai*) indicates the lack of an “inward disposition” (Vincent, 264) of being puffed up with “too great zeal for another” (Bengel, 241) because of one’s own sense of superiority. It denotes one who does not practice “conceited[ness] or *put on airs*”. . . [There is no being] “*puffed up in favor of one against the other*” (BAG, 877).

V. 5: “does not practice behaving shamelessly with nakedness, does not constantly seek its own things, does not practice being irritable, does not practice considering the wrong”

6. “does not practice behaving shamelessly with nakedness” (*ouk aschemonei*) occurs only here and 7:36 in the NT. It denotes “assuming a fine outward appearance which does not express the inward reality” (Bruce, 126). It denotes “anything disgraceful, dishonourable, indecent” (Morris, 184). It is rooted “in selfishness and want of sympathy” (Farrar, 424).

7. “does not constantly seek its own things” (*ou zetei ta heautes*) indicating it is not preoccupied or obsessed with its “own interests (10:24, 33)” (Robertson, 178). It denotes “selfishness” (Findlay, 899). Much evil is rooted in this.

8. “does not practice being irritable” (*ou paroxunetai*) refers to “sharpness of spirit” (Robertson, 178) and occurs in the NT here and Acts 17:16. This is being “intent on one’s own advantage, one is incessantly angered to find the world at cross purposes with him” (Findlay, 899).

9. “does not practice considering the wrong” (*ou logizetai to kakon*) but prefers the right. That is, the wrong is “done to love with a view to settling the account” (Robertson, 178). “It does not take into account the evil done to it” (Gould, 112). “Love, instead of entering evil as a debt in its account-book, voluntarily passes the sponge over what it endures. It feels no criminal *joy* on seeing the faults which may be committed by men of an opposite party. Rather than eagerly turn to account the wrong which an adversary thus does to himself, it mourns on account of it” (Godet, 246).

As Farrar (424) observes, “love is neither suspicious, nor implacable, not retentive in her memory of evil done. Love writes

our personal wrongs in ashes or in water.”

V. 6: “does not rejoice in the presence of unrighteousness, but rejoices together with the truth”

**10.** “does not rejoice in the presence of unrighteousness, denotes that “to ‘rejoice at iniquity,’ when seeing it in others, is a sign of deep debasement” (Findlay, 899). Those who do so find “real joy in the triumph of evil” (Robertson, 178). Love does the opposite. “The rejoicing at sin, the taking pleasure in them that commit sin, the exultation over the fall of others into sin, are among the worst forms of malignity (Rom. 1:32; 2 Thes. 2:12)” (Farrar, 424).

**11.** “but rejoices together with the truth” indicates that “love accepts [truth], keeps it pure, exults in all its triumphs (Acts 11:23; 2 John 4)” (Farrar, 424). Love rejoices together with or in conjunction with the truth because “to make morality prevail is the ethical aim of the truth” (Meyer, 304). As Gould (112) adds, “Truth has for its object the production of righteousness, and rejoices in it – a joy which love shares.”

V. 7: “keeps on enduring all things, keeps on believing all things, keeps on exerting confidence in all things, keeps on standing firm [in] all things”

**12.** “keeps on enduring all things” (*panta stegei*) means that love “covers, protects, forbears; throws a veil over sins” (Robertson, 178). Love “endures wrongs and evils, and covers them with a beautiful reticence” (Farrar, 424). As Vincent (265) notes: “it keeps out resentment as the ship keeps out the water, or the roof the rain.” Godet (247) states, “Charity seeks to excuse others, to throw a mantle over their faults, charging itself, if need be, with all the painful results which may follow.”

**13.** “keeps on believing all things” (*panta pisteuei*) indicates “not [being] gullible, but has faith in men” (Robertson, 178). The verb “believing” or “faith” is often used in reference to God rather than man. Here, however, “it denotes apparently confidence in man; but in reality this confidence has for its object the Divine in man, all that remains in him of God’s image” (Godet, 248).

Farrar’s (424) words are dazzling: Love “takes the best and kindest views of all men and all circumstances, as long as it is possible to do so. It is the opposite to the common spirit, which drags everything in, paints it in the darkest colours, and makes

the worst of it. Love is entirely alien from the spirit of the cynic, the pessimist, the ecclesiastical rival, the anonymous slanderer, the secret detractor.” As Gould (112) notes: Love is “unsuspicious and trustful.”

**14.** “keeps on exerting confidence in all things” (*panta elpizei*) indicates that one “sees the bright side of things [and] does not despair” (Robertson, 178-179); “it does not despair of good in others” (Gould, 112). Even though love does not deny pain or disappointment, it, nevertheless, “while recognizing with pain the present triumph of sin, [also] cherishes the hope of the future victory of good” (Godet, 248). Indeed, this word is commonly and correctly translated “hope.” But it does not denote a crossed-fingers kind of hope with the possibility that such hope may not be realized. Rather, as indicated in the above translation, it depicts “assurance” or “confidence.” It is “something more than the result of a sanguine temperament, that it is a gift of grace. Hope is averse to sourness and gloom. It takes sunny and cheerful views of man, of the world, and of God, because it is a sister of love” (Farrar, 424).

**15.** “keeps on standing firm [in] all things” (*panta hupomenei*) refers to perseverance. One “carries on like a stout-hearted soldier” (Robertson, 179). Love “does not weary” (Godet, 248). It stands tall “whether the ‘seventy times seven’ offences of a brother (Luke 17:4), or the wrongs of patient merit (2 Tim. 2:24), or the sufferings and self denials and persecutions of the life spent in doing good (2 Tim. 2:10)” (Farrar, 424). It “bears, without changing to hatred, hateful things” (Gould, 112). Love maintains “patient acquiescence, holding its ground when it can no longer believe or hope” (Vincent, 265).

V. 8: “Love never fails; but if prophecies, they shall be set aside; if speaking in tongues, they shall cease; if knowledge, it shall be set aside”

**16.** “love never fails” (*he agape oudepote piptei*) indicates that love “survives everything” (Robertson, 179). The emphasis here is on its “objective permanence” (Godet, 248). Farrar (425) depicts a twofold meaning: “1. *is never hissed off the stage* like a bad actor,’ *i.e.*, it has its part to play even on the stage of eternity. 2. [never] *falls away* like the petals of a withered flower.” Love “holds its place” (Vincent, 265). Love is “an enduring virtue” (Gould, 112).

Prophecies, tongues, and knowledge are “but temporary manifestations: the fruit of the Spirit abides” (Bruce, 127).

Paul seems to mean that “all things [like these three] cease to exist as isolated parts whenever they come together as a whole. For example, the parts of a jigsaw puzzle become a whole picture when they are put together” (Howard, 114).

So, Paul is urging his readers to view the individual gifts as meaningless apart from their connectedness to all the others. This understanding seems to flow naturally with v. 9.

V. 9: “for we know by means of parts and we preach the message of God by means of parts”

Since our knowledge comes to us in partial packages, we never reach full comprehension or absolute mastery of whatever knowledge we are pursuing or seeking to attain. It is always partial and gained in bits and pieces.

Our preaching also is delivered in bits and pieces. All of the message of God cannot possibly be delivered in full, total, or complete presentation at any single moment in time. After all, when it comes to God’s pre-existence and even present existence; creation; the Trinity; the Incarnation; God’s providence; God’s salvation; the Church and her purpose on this planet; the end of time, etc.

Yes, we know and we preach “in parts” only.

V. 10: “But when the perfect may be realized, that which is by means of parts will be set aside”

The “perfect” refers to the end of the world and the important, essential use of the spiritual gifts, when Christ returns. Paul transitions from the part to the whole. The word “perfect” (*teleion*) refers to replacing that which is imperfect; that which is partial with that which is total. In other words, “our view [then] will not only embrace the totality of Divine things; but it will contemplate them from the centre, and consequently in their real essence. At present not only do we know only fragments, but even these we discern but indistinctly [as v. 12 illustrates]” (Godet, 252).

Indeed, when the “partial” or tidbits of our knowledge and preaching have done all that they can do, the incomplete and partial and temporary will be swallowed up in complete and eternal realization. All will be finished as far as God’s mission on this planet is concerned.

Now, our partial glimpses of knowledge and our periodic

pronouncements of God's truths are limited. Indeed, "all of the forms of our earthly knowing and our prophesying of spiritual things serve only an earthly and a temporal purpose. Both shall eventually be vastly surpassed" (Lenski, 565) at Christ's return. The Second Coming or Advent of Christ is that moment when "the perfect" will be "realized." Indeed, when the consummation is reached, all that is partial will be "set aside" (*katargethesetai*) – "rendered ineffective, nullified, cancelled; destroyed, abolished, done away with; used up." When God decides to bring things to an end or conclusion on this planet, all things which characterized its features or traits will be terminated or exterminated – "including the charismata ['spiritual gifts']" (Grosheide, 310).

V. 11: "When I was a child, I would be speaking as a child, thinking as a child, reasoning as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things"

In comparing/contrasting that which is partial to that which is complete, Paul uses the analogy of childhood in relation to adulthood. Just as a human being's natural growth is that of "development and transformation" (Godet, 252), even so, Paul's point is simple enough for his readers. Just as a man is proud to shake-off the immature variables of childhood, so the mature [or maturing] Christian "substitutes the manly activity of the profession which he has embraced for the passionate dreams of childhood and youth" (Ibid, 253).

"In this present life, we possess only an infinitesimal fraction of the knowledge of God and his truth. In the life to come, we will know vast treasures of the knowledge of God, so that we may describe life now as the life of children compared to life then. There will be no need of candles when we possess the brightness of the sun" (Brown, 374).

V. 12: "For now we see through a mirror dim or obscure images, but then face to face; now we know by means of parts but then we shall know even as we have been fully known"

To further illustrate his point, he employs the analogy of a mirror. Such analogy was most appropriate for Paul's use since Corinth was famous for making polished and reflective mirrors. Despite its highly polished metal, however, "even at its best, [it] gave but an imperfect reflection" (Barclay, 125). As Godet (254) notes: "The image which they presented



could never be perfectly distinct.” Even so, our perception of divine things is like an image in a mirror. It is limited at best for the now, but will expand dramatically then.

The double use of the words “but then” (*tote de*) use different follow-up phrases to same the same thing. Paul is not referring to the “cessation of extraordinary gifts in the later ages of the Church, but to the end of the present life, either at death or at the coming of Christ” (Beet, 237).

The words “face to face” (*prosopon pros prosomon*) echo Genesis 32:30; cp. Numb. 12:8; and indicate “immediately, without the intervention of an imperfect medium” (Gould, 113).

The word “know” (*ginosko*) means “to understand: an intelligent comprehension which looks down upon and through a matter” (Beet, 236).

The word “we shall know” (*epignosko* – future tense) is compared (“even as”) with and qualified by the subsequent “we have been fully known” (*epegnosthen* – 1<sup>st</sup> aorist tense with passive voice) – by God Himself, of course.

“God knows us immediately, fully; and the apostle looks forward to a time when his knowledge of divine things is to be like that, though not equal to it” (Gould, 113).

Moulton (113) paraphrases as follows: “Now I am acquiring knowledge which is only partial at best: then I shall have learnt my lesson, shall *know*, as God in my mortal life knew me.”

V. 13: “And now the supreme class of spiritual possessions continues: faith, hope, love, these three, and the greatest of them is love”

Brown (375) provides a neat perspective: “*Faith* abides because it is trust in God’s saving work revealed in Christ. Only those who trust will know the eternal presence in God. *Hope* abides because it is faith that perseveres and is serene in confidence in God. *Love* abides because it is God’s nature and is, therefore, as everlasting as the Father. . . . It is the greatest of all because it expresses God’s being, as faith and hope do not. God’s love gives man a basis for faith and hope, which are marks of man’s life, but not God’s.”

Indeed, as early as The Song of Solomon 8:7: “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” Love is immortal. It is an absolutely permanent and unconquerable phenomenon. As Barclay (125) notes: “When love is entered into, there comes into life a relationship against which the as-

saults of time are helpless and which transcends death.” And so, Paul completes his portrait of the motive and manner in which and by which spiritual gifts are to be recognized as the indispensable realities for both Church functioning and growth.

c. Spiritual Gifts - Part II (14:1-40)

This section touches on guidelines for the use of preaching and speaking in tongues in public worship services, as well as guidelines for decency and orderliness in such services.

This overview of this part of the letter provides valuable perspectives on its content: *The Superiority of Preaching to Speaking in Tongues*: Vs. 1-12: The contrast between preaching and speaking in tongues – benefits for church and individual; Vs. 13-20: The spiritual aspect is stressed but without understanding, as in the case of preaching; Vs. 21-25: Speaking in tongues “does not produce favorable impression on outsiders, while prophecy is convincing and revealing” (Gould, 114); *The Practical Applications*: Vs. 26-33: The essentials of edification, interpretation, and revelation; Vs. 34-36: The subordination of women in public worship; Vs. 37-39: The Lord’s authority must be recognized by the church in the life of one who claims to be a spiritual speaker. Failure in this regard, renders one’s claim to possess charismata null and void. Vs. 40: All preaching and speaking in tongues must be exercised under the principle of decency and order.

The foregoing coverage of speaking in tongues indicates that “in Corinth, glossalalia is an unintelligible ecstatic utterance. One of its forms of expression is a muttering of words or sounds without interconnection or meaning” (Behm, 722).

V. 1: “All of you must keep on pursuing love, and all of you must keep on desiring spiritual gifts, especially that you may preach”

As the underlying motive and manner in which and by which the spiritual gifts are to be exercised, this sacred, sacrificial kind of love must always be pursued with earnestness and diligence. All of the Christians at Corinth are to be faithful in this regard, and not just any special group or recipients of these spiritual gifts who must be so engaged.

As Paul will note here, and verses 5, 39, it is the gift of preaching which is more important, ranks higher, and carries

more overall benefit for the congregation than does either speaking in tongues or any other particular gift. This verb is transliterated “prophesy, prophesying”

It is not uncommon to think that the word “prophesy” (*propheteuete*) always refers to the telling of future events, people, or happenings. But as Trench (20-21) observes:

This *foretelling* or *foreannouncing* may be, and often is, of the office of the prophet, but is not of the essence of that office. [he is] the *outspeaker*; he who speaks *out* the counsel of God with the clearness, energy and authority which spring from the consciousness of speaking in God’s name, and having received a direct message from Him to deliver. . . that he is not primarily, but only accidentally, one who foretells things future; being rather one who, having been taught of God, speaks out his will.

Indeed, as Friedrich (852) notes: “For the prophet the secret counsels of God are revealed and he declares them to the community through his preaching. . . . the prophet edifies the whole community. The prophet’s message is for all the members.” So, preaching “is preferred because it edifies and seeks the profit of others, instead of its own glory” (Gould, 114).

V. 2: “For the one who is speaking in tongues is not speaking to men but to God, for no one understands him, but in spirit he is speaking mysteries”

Speaking in tongues “is a spiritually effected speaking (14:2 ff., 14 ff.; cf. 12:10, 28, 30), not to men, but God. . . . its value is for the individual concerned rather than for the community as a whole” (Behm, 722).

Indeed, the gift of speaking in tongues is not directed to the entire congregation but to God. What he says is a mystery to the hearers since it is like the sound of a “foreign language” (v. 11. cp. 16) or unintelligible words. Before the entire congregation, which may also consist of outsiders, without an interpreter, the person speaking could be accused of being “mad, maniac” (v. 23). So, the tongue-speaker may interpret his own words (vs. 5, 13) or another brother must be able to give an interpretation.

Plus, there may be many in the church who are speaking in tongues, so “the number of those who speak with tongues at divine service may be fixed” (Friedrich, 852) to “one at a time” (v.

27). Interpretation or an interpreter must be present for edification's sake (v. 5, 13, 26-28).

The word "mysteries" refers to the contents of speaking in tongues, "though these are not hereby manifested, but remain ineffable divine mysteries" (Bornkamm, 822) or which are "unexplained" (Robertson, 181).

V. 3: "And the one who is preaching is speaking to men for edification and exhortation and encouragement"

The special accent or emphasis on "preaching" in v. 1 is now expanded from a threefold standpoint in which its advantageous nature is without controversy: it is "a means of building up Christian character, of strengthening men, of giving them comfort in their distress" (Morris, 191).

The word "edification" (*oikodomen*) denotes "in the first instance the act of building. . . . the primary reference is to spiritual furtherance. . . . Whatever takes place in the community should contribute to this edifying. . . . The decisive criterion in judging charismata is whether the community receives edification" (Michel, 145).

The word "encouragement" (*paraklesin*) indicates "that there is nothing sharp, polemical, or critical" (Schmitz, 796). But since the word does convey "the special sense of 'consolation,' it is better to translate with 'exhortation'" (Grosheide, 318; cp. Vincent, 267); "the stimulation of the Christian will" (Findlay, 902). Bengel (245) says this "takes away sluggishness."

The word "encouragement" (*paramuthian*) is "the strengthening of the Christian spirit" (Findlay, 902). This, according to Bengel (245) takes away sadness." Stahlin (821) notes that this word carries with it "genuine comfort." So, the comfort of the divine comes through preaching.

V. 4: "The one who is speaking in tongues edifies only himself; but the one who is preaching is edifying the church"

That is, tongues is only for the benefit of the individual (Behm, 722). Bruce (130) notes, "it brings him more into the presence of God – good and well." Alford ( 590) states that "the intensity of the feeling of prayer or praise in which he utters the words is edifying to him, though the words themselves are unintelligible." This is the "constant result of 'speaking to God'" (Beet, 241). Preaching, on the other hand, "is like a torrent of living water which overspreads and quickens the whole church. Hence the

conclusion drawn, ver. 5” (Godet, 268).

So, the contrast is clear: speaking in tongues edifies only the one who is speaking, while preaching edifies the whole church because “he speaks intelligibly” (Gould, 115).

V. 5: “ And I wish all of you to speak in tongues, but even more so that you may preach; the one who is preaching is greater than the one who is speaking in tongues unless he interprets in order that the church may receive edification”

To make sure that he is not misunderstood, Paul expresses his desire for all in the church to speak in tongues: for their personal benefit, that is. However, he is not “clandestinely commanding all the Corinthians to seek tongues, merely admitting that it would be nice if all could speak in them” (Blomberg, 269).

“To make glossolalia serviceable to the community, however, either the speaker or another brother must be able to give an interpretation” (Behm, 722).

But given the nature of their misuse in the church, and for the benefit of the entire congregation, he notes that it would be better to have the gift of preaching.

V. 6: “And now, fellow Christians, if I may come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you unless I shall speak to you by revelation or by knowledge or by preaching or by teaching?”

The only way Paul’s arrival in Corinth could benefit them was if he could bring a message which they could comprehend – and that would not be by speaking in tongues. However, they would be helped if he spoke by means of a:

1. “revelation” (*apokalupsei*) - a direct message from God. Oepke’s (580) foundation for understanding Paul’s use of the term is critical:

The NT inherits OT revelation. The God of the NT is the same as that of the OT, not in the sense of an absolute identity of conception, but in the sense of a continuity of salvation history. The NT constantly presupposes the OT. This connection is basic to its view of revelation. . . . [This revelation is] ecstatic and visionary in nature. He presupposes that other members of the community have similar direct revelations, and he classifies these with knowledge, preaching, and teaching.

2. “knowledge” (*gnosei*) – “the illumination of the meaning of the Christian life” (Brown, 378). While no one can be an expert in all matters in this life, even in regard to the Christian faith, everyone can exert more efforts to “grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pt. 3:18). The failure to pursue this pathway may reveal, more than anything else, the spiritual poverty which exists among and with so many professing Christians.

3. “preaching” (*propheteia*) – “because it sets forth God’s will through the power of the Holy Spirit” (Ibid.). This word should not be restricted to so-called “licensed ministers.” After all, Acts 8:4 declares that all those in the church who had scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria “went every where preaching the Word.” Cp. 11:20.

4. “teaching” (*didache*) – “because it clarifies and applies the meaning of the gospel of God’s activity in Jesus Christ” (Ibid), that is, appropriate “instruction in the Christian faith” (Morris, 192). As Barclay (130) observes: “And it may well be that the faith of many people collapses and the loyalty of many people grows cold because they have not thought things out and thought them through.”

Phillips translates this verse: “For suppose I came to you, my brothers, speaking with ‘tongues,’ what good could I do you unless I could give you some revelation of truth, some knowledge in spiritual things, some message from God, or some teaching about the Christian life?”

V. 7: “Even lifeless things give a sound, either a flute or a harp, if they may not give a distinction in tones, how shall it be known whether it is the flute or the harp?”

Even in lifeless things “there is an unarticulated sound as of an instrument played with no clear differentiation of notes” (Behm, 722). That is, one cannot recognize what particular instrument is being played unless the tones are adequately heard to differentiate whether it is a flute (a wind instrument) or a harp (a stringed instrument).

V. 8: “For if a trumpet may give an indistinct sound, how shall he prepare himself for battle?”

The sound of the trumpet for soldiers must be clearly given so that they know whether the sound indicates to advance or to retreat.

V. 9: “Even so for you also, unless through the spirit all of you may speak what is easily understood, how shall it be known what is being spoken?”

In verses 9-11, Paul points out that “foreign languages remain unintelligible to those who have not learned them” (Bomberg, 269). They will be “spoken in the void” (Behm, 722).

The words “even so for you also” tie together the analogy about trumpet sounds and their application to those Christians in Corinth. “If the trumpet call can’t be distinguished, will anyone show up for battle? So if you speak in a way no one can understand, what’s the point of opening your mouth? (*The Message*).

The “pride and lovelessness [of these Corinthians created] an assembly which was just as confused, utterly disorderly, and devastating” (MacArthur, 375) as the lack of clarity concerning what sound was being indicated from inanimate objects. MacArthur (375) continues by depositing this understanding of the verse: “The Corinthians were so carnally self-centered that they could not have cared for less about communication. They were interested in impressing others, not communicating with them, much less edifying them.”

Olaf M. Norlie, *The New Testament: A New Translation*, states: “Therefore, in speaking, you too must use a language that men can understand.” Again, they will be “spoken in the void” (Behm, 722) if understanding does not transpire.

Phillips translates: “So, in your case, unless you make intelligible sounds with your ‘tongue’ how can anyone know what you are talking about? You might just as well be addressing an empty room.”

“It is the same with you [as with the musical instruments]: if you do not use your tongue to produce speech that can be readily understood, how can anyone know what you are saying? You will be talking to the air” (*The New Jerusalem Bible*).

V. 10: “There are, for example, many languages in the world and none without meaning”

Verses 10-11 “confirm by a new example the proof given in vers. 7-9” (Godet, 274).

That is, there are “so many kinds of *voices*, and no kind is *voiceless*. By *voices* are meant *languages*” (Vincent, 268). To put it another way, the world is full of a “*multitude* of

human dialects” (Findlay, 905) and none of them are without meaning to someone.

Paul himself, of course, was a “much-traveled missionary [and] had heard many different dialects spoken. He had known what it was to live in the midst of people whose language he did not understand” (Craig, 200). But there were plenty of others who did understand them.

V. 11: “Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be to the who is speaking a foreigner and the one who is speaking to me a foreigner”

The twofold use of the word “foreigner” (*barbaros*) indicates a distinct “disadvantage” (Moulton, 75); “spoken in the void” (Behm, 722). That is, a foreigner “is ignorant of the speech and habits of a people” (Alford, 592). Again, Paul had found this out the hard way.

His application of this truth to tongues and preaching is on target.

V. 12: “Even so you also, since all of you are zealous for spiritual gifts, you must be zealous for the edification of the church in order that all of you may have more than enough”

This verse opens with the exact words in v. 9. That is, “after the lesson conveyed by this example” (Alford, 592).

Zeal for spiritual gifts is entirely inappropriate if there is not a corresponding zeal for the building up of the church. They were locked into an absurd or ridiculous mindset about spiritual gifts. Their zeal was self-serving, self-enriching, and self-motivated. So, Paul declares that their “zealous striving after gifts of the Spirit” should be geared to the right way: “*with a view to the edification of the church*” (Meyer, 320) – that is, “help forward the spiritual life of their brethren” (Beet, 245).

The fulfilling of this purpose would result in “all of you [2<sup>nd</sup> person plural] abounding” (*perisseuete*) and benefitting from the gifts.

V. 13: “Therefore, the one speaking in tongues must pray that he may interpret”

The word “therefore” (*dio*) draws the inferential conclusion, in light of the intended building up of the church in her functioning and growth, to keep one’s focus, as a tongues-speaker,



in line with a larger goal. That is, “to make glossolalia serviceable to the community, either the speaker or another brother must be able to give an interpretation” (Behm, 722).

V. 14: “For if I may pray in a tongue, my spirit is praying, and my mind is without benefit [for anyone]”

When praying in a tongue, “the mind is distinguished from the spirit [which is] the reflective and so-called discursive [rambling] faculty . . . Religious feelings and activities – prayer in chief – take their rise in the spirit; normally, they pass upward into conception and expression through the intellect” (Findlay, 907). “In this inspired utterance the ‘mind’ is swallowed up, so that mysterious words, obscure both to the speaker, and to the hearers, are spoken in the void” (Behm, 722).

V. 15: “What then is it? I shall pray with the spirit, and I shall also pray with the mind. I shall sing with the spirit, and I shall also sing with the mind?”

So, what follows from this perspective?

It is best to use both the spirit and the mind in praying.

It also involves singing (cf. Ac. 10:46). This refers “not to the repetition of the hymns of others, but to the improvising of songs of praise by the singer under inspiration (Cf. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)” (Gould, 118).

V. 16: “Otherwise if you bless in the spirit [only], how shall the one who occupies the place of the ungifted say the Amen upon the giving of thanks since he does not what you are saying?”

The word “otherwise” (*epei*) denotes the appearance of “an interlocutor [a person who takes part in a conversation or dialogue] acting in an opposite way whom he wishes to convince of his mistake” (Godet, 282). In other words, “if one is praying and praising God in an ecstatic prayer, the one who does not understand the ecstasy will be at a loss when to say ‘amen’ at the close of the prayer” (Robertson, 183) - this will not benefit the church as a whole! The word “ungifted” (*idiotou*) means one who is not gifted or skilled in tongues (cp. v. 23f).

The word “Amen” (*Amen*) is a transliteration of the Greek word and means “truly, indeed, say it again.” This word occurs 22 times in the NT and 51 times in the NT.

According to 1 Chron. 16:36; Neh. 5:13; 8:6; Ps. 106:48, for example, it was a positive responsive of agreement from those to the Lord God Almighty. It was common at the close of prayers, as well as the giving of thanks after the Lord's Supper, etc.

V. 17: "For you are, indeed, giving thanks well enough but the other one is not being edified"

This verse reaffirms v. 16: There should be no tongues-speaking in the church without interpretation. All may be "well enough" for the person who is speaking, but the one who lacks either the gift of tongues or interpretation will not be edified or built up, which is why it is to be avoided.

V. 18: "I am giving thanks to God, I am speaking in tongues more than all of you"

Now, Paul does not mean to downplay or discount the gift of speaking in tongues in its proper place or as it fulfills its God-ordained purpose. In fact, Paul here confesses that "in the matter of glossolalia he certainly surpasses the Corinthians but every gift is one of grace so that boasting is ruled out" (Grosheide, 327).

V. 19: "But in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, in order that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue"

Nevertheless, Paul is careful to note that he only uses his gift for the benefit of the entire church. In those church meetings, for example, where the aim, goal, or purpose is that of edification and instruction, his position is to speak five words with his understanding rather than ten thousand tongues which would only result in confusion to the hearers who did not have the gift of interpretation. So, Paul is practicing what he preaches. It is important to note that "Paul says nothing here or elsewhere about using tongues in private devotion, and it is best not to draw a conclusion regarding this point" (Lenski, 596).

V. 20: "Fellow Christians, you must not be children in thinking but in the evil you must be babes, and in thinking you must be mature"

Before hitting the note of repentance, he, again, notes their value as "fellow Christians" (*adelphoi*) – the very reason why he is directing them to repentance.

By their overwhelming zealousness in pursuing tongues-speaking, it was evident that “they lacked more and more the power of distinguishing and judging between the useful and the useless; their speaking in tongues assumed the character of childishness” (Meyer, 323). They were hitting the discordant minor note and missing the harmonious major note.

Their childishness was not to be curtailed or avoided altogether. In fact, it was to be displayed but only in regard to “evil”; that is, to “being free from all malicious thoughts and actions” about and toward one another during the Lord’s Supper and public worship services where the exercise of spiritual gifts was to be paramount.

V. 21: “In the law it is written that **By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I shall speak to the people and even then they will not listen** to Me, says the Lord”

The word translated “strange tongues” (*heteroglossois*) occurs here only in the NT. Paul is here explaining Is. 28:11-12; Deut. 28:49. “The men of another speech are Assyrians, whereas for Paul they are men who speak the language of heavenly spirits. But this is simply an example of Paul’s sovereign reinterpretation of the OT, for which there are many parallels among the Rabbis, and of which this is an instructive instance” (Behm, 727). In other words, “people will not listen to speech in *strange tongues*. They do not respond in faith and obedience, which is what God desires of men” (Brown, 379).

Oh, in a sad note of stunning reality, “God spoke to Israel through the strange Assyrian tongue in *retribution*, not to confirm their faith but to consummate their unbelief” (Findlay, 910).

V. 22: “So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to the unbelievers, and preaching is not for the unbelievers but to those who believe”

The “sign” to which Paul is referring is the sign of judgment for unbelievers. That is, “non-Christians in Corinth will wind up being condemned (even if inadvertently) by those who speak in undecipherable languages” (Blomberg, 271).

Gould (120) clarifies the matter: “tongues contain simply the element of proof, and so subserve no useful purpose with those already convinced, [but preaching] contains instruction as well as proof [and] is specially for believers.”

As Bengel (248) phrases it, “Unbelievers, generally, when tongues fall upon them, continue unbelievers, but prophecy makes believers of unbelievers, feeds believers.”

V. 23: “Therefore, if the whole church may assemble together, and all are speaking in tongues, and ungifted or unbelievers may enter, shall they not be saying that you are mad?”

“The uncontrolled use of tongues might thus make it appear that the community is an assembly of madmen” (Behm, 722). In this context, the unbelievers “will remain lost in their sins because they will reject the gospel as the product of insane babblers” (Blomberg, 271).

V. 24: “And if all are preaching, and an unbeliever or an ungifted one may enter, he is undergoing conviction by all [he hears], he is being called to account by all [he hears]”

This is the positive pitch of preaching. This verse does not guarantee that everyone who hears the preaching of the Word of God will be convicted and, therefore, converted by means of what they hear. But it does disclose that this is the primary way or means by which the purpose of preaching occurs.

V. 25: “the secrets of his heart are being disclosed, and so after having fallen down upon his face, he shall worship before God declaring that ‘God is certainly among you’”

Through this preaching of the Word of God, the Holy Spirit discloses to people their own sinfulness and absolute need of the forgiveness of God. By responding to this disclosure of truth from God, they fall down before God in penitence, repentance, and wind up worshipping the God Who called them to Himself through Jesus Christ.

This conversion to Christianity results in their confession that the presence of God was clearly and convincingly among them and that He is now within them! Cp. Is. 45:14; Dan. 2: 47; Zechariah 8:23.

V. 26: “Therefore, what is it, fellow Christians? When you may assemble together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. All things must be done for edification.”

As Bruce (134) notes, “the upshot of all this is that when the church meets, it is perfectly proper for each member to contribute to the worship.” Paul notes five component parts involved in these gift-oriented contributions to worship:

1. “a psalm” (*psalmon*) – This means any one of the Psalms which was typically used as “a religious hymn” (Gould, 123). The beginning of the worship was one of praise!
2. “a teaching” (*didachen*) – This is an elaboration upon some part, aspect, or component of the Christian faith.
3. “a revelation” (*apokalupsin*) – This would “naturally be the contribution of a prophet” (Bruce, 134).
4. “a tongue” (*glossan*) The regulations of tongues and their interpretation in public worship have been addressed
5. “an interpretation” (*hermeneian*)

As to whether or not Paul is constructing an order to be closely followed may be open question without a closed answer. But “All things must be done for edification.” The unity, purpose, aim, drive, direction, and mutual respect and collaboration by and with and for one another are at stake – the upbuilding or building up of the body of Christ cannot and/or will not take place otherwise!

V. 27: “Or if someone is speaking in a tongue, by two or at most three and one at a time, and one must interpret”

“To make glossolalia serviceable to the community, however, either the speaker or another brother must be able to give an interpretation” (Behm, 722). There appears to be a concrete line drawn here: “one at a time and not over three in all” (Robertson, 184).

V. 28: “and if there may be no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church, and he must speak to himself and to God”

If there is not an interpreter at the meeting, there should be no one allowed to speak in tongues. He can exercise his private gift with himself and God - even “to God but not others (Behm, 722).

V. 29: “And two or three preachers must be speaking and the others must carefully consider what is being said”

The limitation of “three” in regard to tongues is now equally applied to preachers. They are here instructed to make sure

that they listen to or “carefully consider” what the other preachers are saying. Each must be silent as the second and third preachers speak. Then they are free to remark on what they heard.

Brown (381) regards these as “remarkable instructions.”

V. 30: “And if a revelation may be made to one who is sitting, the first one must keep silent”

The “revelation” would come from a preacher. The revelation seems closely related to prophecy in v. 6

“The one who is seating” denotes that the other one who is speaking is standing. So, if a revelation comes to the one who is seating, the one who is speaking must be “made aware of it and cease his [own] discourse” (Alford, 599).

In other words, “God Himself gives a new revelation [to the one who is seated] at the very moment the other prophet is speaking. This also rules out the possibility of a prophet receiving a revelation while the third prophet is already speaking. God Himself has commanded that no more than three prophets shall speak. God, who gives prophecy, also controls it” (Grosheide, 338).

V. 31: “For all are able to preach one at a time, in order that all may learn and all may be encouraged”

The purpose of this controlled and orderly format is that all of the three preachers will have time to speak or exercise their gifts. Each must be considerate of the others, and each must always “give way to others” (Bengel, 250).

In this particular manner, since no one preacher has all the answers to all the questions or concerns at hand, they all learn from one another, and are thereby “encouraged.”

Here, Paul “apparently militates against the evil of two prophets speaking simultaneously, in case one of them received a revelation when the other was speaking. There is no further information as to what the first speaker is to do with his interrupted prophecy; the fact that God Himself interrupted it is enough” (Grosheide, 339).

V. 32: “And the spirit of preachers is subject to preachers”

Beet (255) notes that “the prophet’s spirit, which is the source of all his ordinary activity and the medium of the extraordinary activity of prophecy, is even while under the special influence

of the Holy Spirit still under his own control.” They were not, that is, carried away into never-never land where they lost total control of themselves and became “unable to take their turn in orderly consecutive prophesying” (Ibid.).

As MacArthur (391) observes:

Not only are prophets to judge the authenticity of what other prophets say, but each prophet is to have control of his own spirit. The Bible knows nothing of out-of-spirit or out-of-mind revelations. Those to whom God revealed His Word did not always fully comprehend the message they were given, but they were always fully aware of what the message was and aware that it was given to them by God. There were no ecstatic, bizarre, trancelike experiences related to divine action or the prophet, such as occurred and occurs with demonic revelations. That was one clear test to distinguish the work of the Holy Spirit from the work of demons, and assumes the Corinthians were having difficulty so distinguishing.

V. 33: “For God is not of disorder but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints”

This succinct statement provides the foundation and/or basis of all that Paul is saying. Without adherence to God and His peace, “a spectacle of complete disorder” (Godet, 308) would be forthcoming. All churches are to be characterized by this maxim or rule of appropriately ordered conduct. The absence of it reveals or manifests the absence of God.

V. 34: “The women must keep silent in the churches for they themselves are not allowed to speak, but they must subject themselves, just as the law says”

Apparently, the women in the church had been creating disorders in public worship by their dress (11:2-16), as well as their speech. So, to guard against such and keep orderliness at the forefront, Paul did not allow the women in this church to speak.

It is not only the crucial and customary criterion for church conduct, it is also “the law” – by which he is likely referring to Genesis 3:16.

This prohibition does not mean that women could never speak or prophesy in church (11:5). It likely refers to the prohibition of women “taking part in the discussion or interpretation of what had been said by some prophet or teacher during the service” (Morris, 201).

V. 35: “And if they want to learn anything, they must ask their own husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church”

This prohibition even extends to the asking of questions in public worship. This could take place at home where their own husbands could make explanation. After all, it is so serious an issue that it is classified as “shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

The word “shameful” (*aischron*) occurs only two other times in the NT: 11:6, and Eph. 5:12. It denotes what is “ugly, disgraceful” (BAG, 24); “an unfavourable position” (Moulton and Milligan, 15); what is “base, dishonorable” (Thayer, 17).

V. 36: “Or did the Word of God originate from you, or are you the only ones it reached?”

With a note of sarcasm and irony, Paul’s question is blazing with some degree of unbelief: Are they so puffed up with their own knowledge and pride and selfishness that they considered themselves the source from which the Word of God came into being? Did they think that they alone had preserved the integrity and truthfulness of the meaning of God’s Word? Were they the only ones who had ever been reached by God and His Word? Were they the only ones who knew what it meant to be a Christian? Who and what made them so self-sufficient?

The Christians at Corinth were acting “without thinking of any but themselves, as though they were the one Church in the world, or might set the fashion to all the rest” (Findlay, 915).

With this question, Paul is seeking to bulldoze any ideations which are not consistent with truth! “The Corinthian community is not empowered to make innovations” (Craig, 213).

V. 37: “If someone may claim to be a preacher or any other spiritual gift, he must recognize what I am writing to you that it is the Lord’s commands”



Whether it is the gift of preaching or any other spiritual gift, Paul exclaims that what he is writing is in accordance with commands from the Lord.

It is likely, of course, that in such a prideful church that there would be those who questioned Paul's authority to provide such directions to them. Were not their own revelations "as authentically divine as those of the apostle" (Craig, 213)?

Paul boldly declares that what he is writing is consistent with the Lord's commands: a clear claim to inspiration. "Thus he is sure and firm about his message. If there are those in the church who fail to recognize the authentic marks of divine inspiration in the letter that he has written for the spiritual well-being of the church, they thereby cast reflections on their own claim to be spiritually inspired" (Short, 213). Thus, his anticipated opposition is met with "words that ring out like a hammer beating on an anvil" (Ibid.).

V. 38: "And if anyone does not recognize [it], he is not recognized"

In other words, anyone who does not recognize that Paul's "injunctions are vested with the authority of the exalted Lord **is not recognized**: i.e., as a 'spiritual' man" (Bruce, 136).

V. 39: "So then, my fellow Christians, you must earnestly desire to preach and must not forbid to speak in tongues"

So, in closing his comments on the subject, he encourages his "fellow Christians" to seek prophecy as a superior gift for the reasons enumerated in the preceding verses. However, they should not despise, discard, or delete the gift of tongues because their appropriate use is also a gift from the Lord.

V. 40: "All things must take place properly or respectably and in an orderly way"

The word "properly" (*euschemonos*) is an adverb which refers to the manner in which all things in worship and elsewhere in the Christian life are to be measured. The word denotes "not as though it were a mere matter of appearance, for the element of appearance has disappeared from the word completely . . . it refers to honest conduct" (Greeven, 771); "as respects in-

dividuals” (Bengel, 251).

The word “orderly” (*taxin*) indicates “*an arranging, arrangement; a fixed succession observing also a fixed time; character, fashion, quality, style*” (Thayer, 614); “*fixed succession or order*” (BAG, 811); “by turns” (Bengel, 251).

So, public worship is extremely important or significant. And all facets of it must be observed or carried out with regard for orderliness – which involves consideration and cooperation with one another. All “indecorousness [*in poor taste, not suitable; improper; unseemly, undignified*] and undue innovation are alike discouraged” (Morris, 203).

#### D. Salvific Resurrection (15:1-58)

This section touches on the saving significance of the resurrection which is the foundational affirmation of the gospel message. If one denies the possibility of resurrection, then even Christ Himself has not been raised and the consequences of that are hardly digestible. “Paul defends the idea of a spiritual body (vv. 36-49) and then recounts the scenario of the End (vv. 50ff.), insisting that *all*-dead and living alike-must be changed (vv. 51-53)” (Morgan-Wynne, 13).

This overview of this part of the letter provides valuable perspectives on its content: Vs. 1-11: Both the resurrection in general and the resurrection of Christ in particular are preached; Vs. 12-34: Various protests against the resurrection are refuted; Vs. 35-50: Paul provides interesting perspectives on the resurrected body; Vs. 51-58: Paul offers praise to God for the victory which the resurrection makes possible.

##### 1. Preached (15:1-11)

V. 1: “Now I disclose to you, fellow Christians, the gospel which I have preached to you, which you received also, and in which state or condition you are standing”

The verb “disclose” (*gnorizo*) is a relatively common word in the NT. It means “to make known, to remind, to declare; to know.” So, Paul is reminding or telling his fellow Christians about the nuts and bolts of the gospel message which he initially preached to them.

This message is something which they had “received” and became children of God by so doing. By their positive response to the message, they thereby were presently and permanently in a condition for which they were standing secure in Christ. They are His and He is theirs.

V. 2: “by which you are being saved also, if you are keeping [the] word which I preached to you, unless you believed for nothing”

The message is also the means by which they are “being saved” (*sozesthe* a present tense, passive verb = the ongoing process of being delivered by God from the power or dominion of sin).

The word “if” (*ei*) begins a first class conditional clause in which reality is underway; it may be understood to mean “since.” That is, that which Paul assumes to be true is that they are “keeping” (*katechete* – “holding fast, taking possession of” the word which Paul proclaimed to them.

This is not a condition that indicates the possibility of relapse but a condition which Paul states is absolutely true for one who has “received” the gospel message and is “standing” securely in that message which is centered in and revolves around none other than Christ Himself.

The only *out* for them, or anyone anywhere, of course, hinges on whether or not they had “believed for nothing” – that is, “without serious apprehension, without realising the facts involved, *levity* of unbelief” (Findlay, 919), which, of course, was not true of them. Despite the difficulties encountered by this church which are scattered throughout this letter, Paul never stops calling them “brothers, fellow Christians” (1:1, 10, 11, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 5:11; 6:5, 6, 8; 7:12, 15, 24, 29; 8:11, 12, 13 (twice); 9:5; 10:1; 11:2, 33; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26, 39; 15:1, 6, 50, 58; 16:11, 12, 15).

V. 3: “For I delivered to you in the sphere of primary importance, what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures”

The verb “delivered” (*paredoka*) means “to give or hand over; to entrust, to commit, to hand down, to pass on.” Reference, of course, is again to the gospel message of which he has just reminded them in vs. 1 and 2. He here appraises his relaying of that message in terms of its value: “of primary importance” (*protois*) – “first among all things”; “primary principles of the good news” (Williams); “something very important” (Beck); “first importance” (RSV).

Paul, of course, notes that it was something which he himself had received and thus knew its truth and meaningfulness experientially.

He, therefore, with assurance and confidence echoes the essence of that gospel message:

1. “Christ died for our sins” means that His death was an historical fact; He “did not sink into a state of coma from which he afterward recovered” (Lenski, 631). He literally and truly experienced death. This death was sacrificial in nature and intent and was an atoning action in behalf of others; its object was “our sins” – to cover them by means of bearing in His own body the penalty which sins necessitate: death.

The words “according to the scriptures” (*kata tas graphas*) indicate that this atoning, sacrificial, substitutionary death was in accordance

with what the OT prophets had announced (Isa. 53:8-9, etc.). The idea of the Suffering Servant mentioned in Acts 3:13; 8:32, is clearly in focus here, as well.

The fact of “written” prescriptions concerning Jesus’ death fills the pages of the NT: Mt. 26:54, 56; Mk. 9:12; 14:21, 49; Lk. 18:31; 22:37; 24:44, 46; Jn. 19:28. This death was no accident or some parenthetical provision of God at the last moment when things went terribly wrong. His death was in fulfillment of God’s Word.

V. 4: “that He had been buried but that He is presently and permanently raised on the third day according to the scriptures”

2. “He had been buried” indicates that death was verified by the normal or standard practice of burial; what is done to dead people. There was no doubt concerning the reality of His death.

3. “He is presently and permanently raised on the third day” uses the perfect tense of the verb (*egegertai*) which stresses an existing state or condition of being alive both now and evermore. As Moulton (137) notes, the resurrection “sets forth with the utmost possible emphasis the abiding results of the event.” That is, “Christ continues in the character of the risen Lord” (Morris, 206).

V. 5: “and that He had been seen by Cephas, then to the twelve”

4. “He had been seen by Cephas” refers to His resurrection appearance in the eyes of Cephas [the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek “Peter”] as noted exclusively in Lk. 24:34; cp. Mk. 16:7. This visible encounter with Peter likely occurred to give him much-needed assurance as to the reality of forgiveness and encourage him to move forward in the faith. It was like Jesus was saying to him, ‘Don’t look backward but forward; keep your focus on now and the future.’

5. “the twelve” is a shorthand way of referring to the rest of the early apostles. Of course, Judas was no longer among them; and the word “then” indicates that even Peter was not there when Jesus appeared to the others. Also, John 20:19-23 indicates that Thomas was not there either. So, there were literally “nine.”

Blomberg (296) suggests that this could refer to several possibilities: “the Sunday night following Easter (John 20:24-29), the occasion of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20) or the day of Christ’s ascension (Acts 1:1-11).”

V. 6: “then He had been seen by more than five hundred fellow Christians at one time, most of whom are living until now, and some have fallen asleep”

6. Next in the sequence of “seeings” was that of “more than five hundred fellow Christians at one time.” There is no absolute certainty as to exactly where and whom Paul is referring. Nevertheless, “there was no doubt in the mind of Paul as to the authenticity of this particular experience, for he tells his readers that if they care to do so, they can verify his statements by checking them with the majority of that great multitude who were still alive.”

Of course, “some” from among that great number of people had “fallen sleep” (*ekoimethesan*) – a Christian euphemism or mild, indirect way of referring to physical death. This would denote in contrast to “the general hopelessness of the pagan world in the presence of death” (Moulton and Milligan, 350).

V. 7: “the He had been seen by James, then to all the apostles”

7. “James” was the brother of Jesus and his presence with the other brothers of Jesus in the upper room (Ac. 1:14).

8. “all the apostles” refers to Christ’s ascension from Olivet (Ac. 1: 9-11).

V. 8: “and last of all, like a miscarriage, He had been seen by me also”

9. “me also” - Paul himself. He compares his seeing Jesus to that of a miscarriage – something that happens unexpectedly. In other words, the appearance of Jesus to Paul “came to him after Jesus had ascended to heaven” (Robertson, 188) on the road to Damascus. His relationship with the rest of the apostles had a family atmosphere in which his unworthiness was in focus: “he was like an immature and deformed child to the rest of the family” (Alford, 604).

V. 9: “For I myself am the least of the apostles who am not competent to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God”

He now elaborates briefly on this *unworthiness*. He was the least because of his former participation as a persecutor of the church of God. Also, he did not have the three years in the flesh with Jesus, as did the other apostles.

Even though forgiven and adopted into the family and service of God and His church, Grosheide (353) suggests that Paul still had some degree of depression about all the harmful consequences his previous actions likely still held for so many.

V. 10: “but by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace for me

did not become worthless, but I labored more extensively than them, yet not I personally but the grace of God together with me”

The words “I am what I am” “sums up Paul’s entire toil and success: all this he says he owes to the undeserved favour of God” (Beet, 268). So, instead of himself being puffed up with pride over his new family and new role as an apostle, he humbly acknowledges that it was all made possible by the grace of God. This marvelous interruption by God’s grace was the only thing which kept him from viewing his life as “worthless.” Instead, it was God’s grace which prompted, pushed, and enabled him to exert more energy than the other apostles toward fulfilling the mission of God for his life.

V. 11: “Therefore, whether I or they, so we preached and so all of you believed”

So, whether he or the other servants of God were instrumental in preaching the gospel message to the Corinthians, the result was their conversion to Christ and the Christian faith and family. This end result is ultimately the only thing that really matters. It is the dynamic, revolutionary, regenerating, transforming ability of God’s gospel to change lives. They believed “because the resurrection of Christ was the contents of the preaching and at the same time the contents of their faith (v. 12)” (Grosheide, 354).

This salvific resurrection was preached powerfully and with profound results which could not be rationally or sensibly denied. Some, however, were raising or had raised some questions about it and Paul refutes any protests against it in verses 12-34.

## 2. Protests Refuted (15:12-34)

V. 12: “Now if Christ is being preached that He has not been raised from the dead, how are there some among you who are saying that there is no [such thing as] resurrection from the dead?”

The word “if” indicates the reality of preaching in Corinth that Christ had not been raised from the dead. Indeed, one of the protests against the reality of resurrection is that it did not square with and was in direct opposition to a group of new spiritual sceptics in Corinth who said that the idea of the resurrection of the body was “‘a cruel invention,’ a baseless dream” (Moffatt, 239). After all, if a belief exists which denies the possibility of resurrection in general, then that belief punctures and pulverizes the concrete or particular belief in the resurrection of Jesus, as

the next verse addresses.

Actually, in verses 13-19, Paul mentions 7 dreadful consequences if the resurrection of the body is a hoax, myth, or fable:

V. 13: “And if there is no resurrection from the dead, not even Christ has been raised”

1. “Christ has not been raised” – Why? Because His body was dead and laid in a protected tomb.

V. 14: “And if Christ has not been raised, then our message about Christ is empty, and your faith is empty”

2. “our message about Christ is empty” – The word “empty” (*kene*) means “to no purpose, without result; foolish, senseless”; “pretentious, hollow” (Moulton and Milligan, 340).

Why? Because it would have “no content, no substance” (Morris, 210). After all, it was the resurrection by which God validated the sacrifice of Christ; it was the resurrection by which Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4). So, if the resurrection of Christ is not real, then “the Christian preachers have been cruelly misled [and have been cruelly misleading others]. Their hopes have been raised to the heights only to be dashed to the depths” (Short, 225).

3. “your faith is empty” – The same word as above.

Why? Because if there is no resurrection of Christ, then faith in Him would be as hollow, shameful, vain, and shame-based as the message which served as faith’s object. There would be absolutely no foundation upon which faith could rest or direct its devotion.

Their faith would have been “built on an illusion [and] founded on a quicksand that will soon engulf it, and it will perish as though it had never been” (Short, 225).

V. 15: “And we are being found also [as] false witnesses against God because we testified against God that He raised Christ, Whom He did not raise if the dead are not raised”

4. “we are false witnesses against God” – The testimony of Christians about God’s ability to bring about the resurrection would make them “guilty of **misrepresenting God**” (Bruce, 144). “By raising Him from the dead, God had demonstrated that Jesus was not a criminal” (Craig, 225). If the resurrection did not occur, then Jesus must have been a criminal and no positive testimony about God’s resurrection-ability would be possible to give. God lied about it and so the Christians who bore witness to its reality wound up witnessing against God.

V. 16: “For if [the] dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised”

5. “not even Christ has been raised” – This is an echo of v. 13 but Paul is “using it here to confirm his inference of their false witness” (Gould, 130).

V. 17: “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless, all of you are still in your sins”

6. “your faith is worthless ” – The word “worthless” (*mataia*) means “futile, useless; idleness”; “useless expense. . . [and in association with a spinoff of this word] may suggest ‘absence of purpose or failure to attain any true purpose’” (Moulton and Milligan, 391). This is similar to v. 14 but the different word used here accents another meaning.

7. “all of you are still in your sins” – That is, Christ’s claim to be the Saviour who provides forgiveness of sins has “been discredited by the failure to rise from the dead and even their sins remain” (Gould, 130). The power of the Lord to deal with sins has been evaporated and they would only be “entertaining idle dreams of a heaven to be entered without the forgiveness of sins and deliverance which Christ alone can provide” (Moffatt, 242). “In Christ’s resurrection is the seal of our justification, and the spring of our sanctification; both are wanting, if He is still in the grave” (Findlay, 924). Sin wins!

V. 18: “Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished”

8. “deceased Christians have perished” – That is, they “have already received the punishment of their sins” (Gould, 130). As Findlay (925) notes, they have “fallen into utter ruin.” Any hopes of reunion with these deceased Christians are “an illusion” (Short, 230). “Fallen asleep” (*koimethentes*) is a euphemism for physical death.

V. 19: “If in this life only we are setting our hopes in Christ, we are [the] most pitiable of all men”

9. “most pitiable of all men” – The word “pitiable” (*eleeinoteroi*) means “miserable” and occurs only one other time in the NT: Rev. 3:17. Why? Because they lived and died without God. Their “hopes in Christ” were a sham and produced consequences which were as shameful as He Himself. Life for Him and them “turned out to be an iridescent bubble, a vacuous dream” (Lenski, 658).



So, “if the Cross and the Tomb were the end of Jesus, if all men’s hopes of life hereafter are to be founded on spiritual experiences such as have been indicated in our study of the gifts of the Spirit, is there any guarantee at all that the grave is not the end? Paul thinks not” (Short, 232). He elaborates his position convincingly in verses 20-34.

Having addressed the consequences of there being no resurrection of the body, Paul now addresses the consequences of the reality of the resurrection of the body, and specifically that of Jesus Christ Himself.

V. 20: “But in reality Christ has been raised from the dead [being the] firstfruits of those who are sleeping”

.The adverb translated “reality” (*nuni*) appears for the last time in this letter (5:11; 12:18; 13:13; 14:6) as an emphatic word for “now, really.” That is, “as matters now stand” (Alford, 608).

This emphatic assertion pertains to God’s creative, dynamic action in raising Jesus Christ from the dead – “but not [simply] as an individual; his resurrection somehow carried with it the resurrection of all Christians . . . [even] the pledge of more to come” (Moffatt, 244-245).

This startling truth, of course, is the obvious understanding behind and within the word “firstfruits” (*aparche*) – “a Jewish term for anything set apart to God before the remainder could be used” (Newman, 18).

Again, as noted earlier, the word translated “sleeping” is a euphemism for physical death.

V. 21: “For since by means of a man death [came about], by means of a man [the] resurrection of the dead [came about]”

The “first man” (15:47) by means of whom death came about was the “first Adam” (15:45). The “second man” (15:47) by means of whom the resurrection of the dead came about was the “last Adam” (15:45). Cp. Rom. 5:12.

The actions of both of these men had far-reaching consequences for all men: bad [disaster for himself and his descendants] and good [deliverance for Himself and His disciples]. (Cp. Morris, *The Wages of Sin*).

Both were truly men. But the second man, the last Adam, was also the God-Man whose salvific resurrection created a reality which swallows up all the deeds of darkness, decay, and depravity for those who “follow in His steps” (1 Pt. 2:21).

So, the bottom line of this verse and the next is: “by man only can *general effects pervading the whole human race* be introduced” (Alford, 608).

V. 22: “For as in Adam all die, so also in the Christ all shall be made alive”

Robertson and Plummer (353) conclude this meaning of the verse, with which this writer agrees: “As it is in Adam all who die die, so it is in Christ that all who are made alive are made alive . . . All will be raised which is not the same as saying that all will be saved.” That is, some will be raised to eternal life and some to eternal damnation. This understanding seems most consistent with the overall teachings of both OT and NT.

V. 23: “But each in his own order, Christ [the] firstfruits, then those who belong to Christ at His coming”

Indeed, the phrase “each in his own order” (*hekastos de in to idio tagmati*) echoes a military expression about being in a division, rank, troop or company of a relatively large number of people (Robertson, 191). This is the only occurrence in the NT of this word “order” (*tagmati*). As Paul employs the word, he asserts that “each will be raised in the class to which he belongs” (Gould, 131).

Paul only addresses those who belong to Christ with Himself being the “firstfruits.” On the basis of the reality of the resurrection in general, as well as in the concrete person of Christ, Paul provides assurance that “the resurrection of His sleeping ones is bound up with His own” (Findlay, 926). Both Christ and Christians share together in the resurrection of life in His future coming.

V. 24: “Then the end, when He may deliver up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He may abolish all government and all authority and power”

The word “kingdom” (*basileian*) denotes “reigning, ruling.” It is this reigning of Christ which is presently in motion. So, the word “end” (*telos*) refers to the completion of the redemptive reign of Christ on this earth, as verses 25-28 verify. Then all will be submitted to the Father.

Indeed, “after raising His people from death and thus completing their deliverance, Christ solemnly presents His finished work to the Father . . . the end [culmination, completion] of His redemptive reign” (Beet, 276).

The words “government, authority, power” refer collectively to all the hostile powers against the reigning of Christ. Their eventual abolishment is guaranteed because they were the instruments of sin and death. So, “the end” “does not mean the termination of *Christ’s sovereignty*, which in its largest sense began before the world

(John 1:103; 8:5) and is its goal (Col. 1:16); but the termination of *the reign of sin and death* (Rom. 5:21; cf. John 6:37 ff.)” (Findlay, 927).

So, rather than the cessation of the rule or reign of Christ, this will be the time for the inauguration and celebration of the extension of that reign to His God and Father (v. 28).

V. 25: “For He must continue to reign until He puts all the enemies under His feet”

Until this climax occurs, however, Christ will continue to reign. After all, He has been reigning ever since being “exalted to the right hand of God as a Prince and Saviour” (Acts 2:33; 5:31; Phil. 2:9). [Cp. The Superiority of the Person of Christ (Heb. 1:1-4:13) and the Superiority of the Priesthood of Christ (Heb. 4:14-10:18).] Again, “all the enemies” are the forces of evil (“all government, all authority and power”) which are in rebellion against *His reign* as they have asserted and exalted *their own right to reign*.

V. 26: “Death is the last enemy He is to destroy”

The destruction of death will climax the enemies who are being put “under His feet” – a graphic way to depict the certainty and finality of death’s domain: the presence and power of death will be exterminated. Its presence and power will be aborted and rendered impotent or incapable of rearing its ugly head again or welding its dreadfully diverse miseries for even one last shot.

V. 27: “For **He has put all things under His feet**; but when He may say that all things have been and are under His authority, it is evident that He who put all things in subjection to Himself [is] exempt”

Paul, again, employs an OT passage to stress the significance of his position: Ps. 8:6. Here, as well as Hebrews 2, the application of this verse is to Christ – the last Adam (15:45).

To say that “all things have been and are under His authority” prompts Paul to add that “God Himself is exempt from this subjection” (Grosheide, 369).

V. 28: “And when all things have been subjected to Him, then the Son Himself shall be subjected to the One Who subjects all things to Himself, in order that God may be all in all”

When this subjection materializes and is brought to its goal with the

extermination – or at least, termination - of all enemies, the mediatorial ministry of Christ on this earth will itself have materialized or reached its consummation. He lived, He died, He rose again, He was exalted to the right hand of His Father to rule or reign, and He will return again. He, as the Son of God, will then submissively submit or subject “Himself” to God.

This submissiveness, of course, characterized His life on earth and such “will continue to characterize him to the consummation” (Bruce, 148). The purpose of it all is that “God may be all in all” – “the complete supremacy that will then so obviously be His” (Morris, 218).

V. 29: “Otherwise, what shall we do with those who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised, why are they being baptized for them?”

In what could be regarded as an unusual twist at this junction of his discourse on the salvific resurrection – its proclamation (vs. 1-11) and refuting protests concerning it (vs. 12-28) – he brings up a rather unexpected subject: baptism for the dead (vs. 29-34).

However, as will be seen, this is not an excursion of wading into unrelated or irrelevant waters. It is, in fact, a continuation of the main subject at hand.

First, the 10th chapter of this letter “gives a clear warning against a magical-sacramental view of the sacraments” (Beasley-Murray, 265).

Second, the exact origin of baptism for the dead is not certain, nor is its exact meaning or purpose. Robertson (192) states that over thirty interpretations have been offered as to its meaning or purpose.

Third, the fact that some inappropriate views of baptism itself occurred in the church at Corinth is readily seen in this verse. “If the baptism for the dead refers to a practice of baptizing living persons for dead persons, then we have a sub-Christian use of the sacrament, presumably adapted from pagan customs” (Ibid, 353-354).

Fourth, whatever its exact origin or meaning, it was somehow being practiced

among those who were *denying* the resurrection from the dead . . . the custom here can best be interpreted as a drawing attention to a contradiction in the belief and practice of the Church in Corinth: ‘If it be affirmed among you that the dead do not rise, what do those of your number who get baptized for dead people expect to gain from it? . . . So, ‘Paul smites the Corinthian deniers of the resurrection with their own weapons’ [von

Dobschutz]. (190-191).

So, again, instead of switching to an entirely new or different subject in this verse, he is, in fact, continuing with the main subject at hand: arguing against those who deny the resurrection.

Those who were practicing this baptism for others, or who were approving it by others, yet still insisting on the denial of bodily resurrection, were engaged in a contradiction which bordered on insanity.

V. 30: “And why are we running risks every hour?”

In order to underscore this entire line of reasoning, a question that does not seek an answer is offered: “Is it likely that one such as myself should undergo such desperate perils and hazards and suffer such penalties for a mere fantasy [that is, that the resurrection is not real]?” (Short, 241). His very willingness to risk his life by placing his faith in the reality of the resurrection both “undimmed and undiminished helps to illustrate surely the strength and tenacity with which he holds to it. Paul is not indulging his imagination” (Ibid).

V. 31: “Just as I am in daily peril of death, by boasting, my fellow Christians, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord”

The words “I am in daily peril of death,” or “I die daily” [KJV, NAS], or “I myself run the risk of dying every single day” [Williams], or “I’m facing death every day” [Beck] (*hemeran apothnesko*) indicates that “death is his daily companion” (Lenski, 692).

So, his boasting or glorying is not in himself but in Jesus Christ his Lord. It is a boasting saturated with Christian character at its very foundation. It is “a glorying by virtue of his connection with Christ” (Gould, 135).

V. 32: “If according to [merely] human motives I fought wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, **Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die**”

It was not from merely human motivation that he risked his life again and again, such as his encounter with wild beasts at Ephesus – an expression that described some sort of conflict in that city. In fact, it was only the reality of the salvific resurrection of Jesus and himself which “explained his readiness to meet fearful trials and deperate crises” (Moffatt, 254).

Without this assurance and confidence in the salvific resurrection,

“the logical course would be to follow the easy-going proverb which Paul quotes” from Is. 22:13” [56:12] (Morris, 220).

V. 33: “All of you must not go on deceiving yourselves, Bad relationships corrupt good character”

The word “deceiving yourselves” (*planasthe*) is an imperative prohibition to not continue in the pathways of deception or leading yourselves (middle voice) astray. This is not a quote from the OT but a Greek proverbial expression [from the poet Menander] which warns about adopting “a false philosophy of life” (Robertson, 194). Paul may or may not have been familiar with the origin of this expression, He may have even heard it somewhere or seen it written in some public notice. Whatever the case may be, it served his purpose in the need of encouraging the Christians in Corinth to be selective in their social interactions and practices. The word “relationships” or “company” [KJV] (*homiliai*) occurs here only in the NT. It refers to an “association” (BAG, 568) with people whose bad or evil character and conduct are potentially contagious, thus, a must-to-avoid. It means “evil associations corrupt excellent morals” (Farrar, 489).

V. 34: “You must come to your senses and stop sinning, for some of you do not have knowledge of God. I am speaking this to your shame”

The word translated “you must come to your senses” or “awake” [KJV] (*eknepsate*) occurs here only in the NT. It means “to awake from a drunken stupor” (Vincent, 279), as it were. By flirting with resisting or challenging the Christian perspective on salvific resurrection, the Corinthian Christians had been lulled into “the seductions of sensualism and heathen society and the fumes of intellectual pride” (Findlay, 933). So, they need to rouse themselves from this sinfully-oriented spiritual form of a sleeping disorder.

“Some” of them were in the clutches of a quagmire or quicksand that excluded the knowledge of God. This ignorance of God had created a deep canyon of evil, deliverance from which could only transpire by yielding to the knowledge of God which Paul was urgently setting before them.

They had flattered themselves that their possession of knowledge was sufficient (8:1). Paul informs them that this is not the case. His confrontation is designed to make them feel ashamed of themselves – they are without any true knowledge of God. So, “shaming them was the object, and not simply the result of his saying this” (Gould, 136). After all, “knowledge must not be taken in a purely

intellectual sense, it is knowledge that moves the heart – to put the proud Corinthians to shame (cf. 6:5)” (Grosheide, 378) and hopefully lead them to repentance.

3. Perspectives on Resurrected Body (15:35-50)

V. 35: “But someone shall ask, ‘How are the dead raised? And what kind of body do they come back [with]?’”

Paul now tosses two hypothetical questions before them, but they are both interrelated and one cannot be understood apart from the other. The difficulty lies in the nature of the “body.” Since the bodies of the dead Christians had been seen prior to burial, how could they return or resurrect in that same kind of body? He answers the questions in the next verse.

V. 36: “Oh senseless one, what you are sowing is not being made alive until it may die”

It is foolish or senseless “to think that the risen body must be numerically identical with the buried body” (Meyer, 314). The argument posed by these questions is rather void of reality, worthless, and does not contain an ounce of sensibility or rationality. What the body shall be when it is resurrected may be compared to sowing a seed. Their familiarity with the process of sowing a seed and the change that occurs when growth is in motion should shock them out of a sense of wonder or disillusionment. What happens to living plants following their seed being sown and buried makes sense, and so the incredible transformation of a dead body when resurrected should also be classed as sensible. After all, God is the One Who will pull off this transformation. He continues elaborating the matter in v. 37.

V. 37: “and what you are sowing, you are not sowing the body it is going to have but a bare seed perhaps of wheat or something else”

No one sows a seed as it is but as it is going to be. Whether a bare seed of wheat or something else, the difference between what was sown and what it becomes is expected. This is common to all seeds, regardless of what they are. The lesson is the same. The decomposition of the human body and the body which is raised will in no wise be the same. “Far from the decomposition of the body presenting an obstacle to the resurrection it merely prepares us for the thought that the body that is to be raised is much more wonderful than the body that was buried” (Morris, 224).

V. 38: “And God gives it a body just as He desires, and to each of the seeds a body of its own”

Due to God’s oversight in this matter, neither plants nor humans rise due to their own volition or will power. They both come forth because that is the way God has arranged things. It was God Himself who set this process in motion. It was God Himself Who “fixed the rule of dying and rising and He carries it out” (Grosheide, 382).

V. 39: “All flesh is not the same flesh, for there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish”

Regardless of their kind, all animals differ from one another in terms of their substantive makeup. Indeed, the variety which exists in animals shows or demonstrates “the inexhaustible variety of organic forms in the Divine economy of nature and the fitness of each for the life it clothes” (Findlay, 935).

This is the only occurrence in the NT of the word “fish” (*ischuon*). So, don’t be so foolish or senseless as to think that God cannot produce a resurrected body for mortal man!

V. 40: “and heavenly bodies, and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the [glory] of the earthly is another”

To further drive home his point, Paul, after having contrasted the differences between various bodies of earthly life, now contrasts the heavenly (celestial) and earthly (terrestrial) bodies which also differ in their natures. He expands this in v. 41.

V. 41: “even glory of [the] sun, and another glory of [the] moon, and another glory of [the] stars, for a star differs from a star in glory”

The sun, the moon, and the stars, as celestial bodies, have different “glories” or manifestations of their essence.

As Bruce (151) clarifies: “All this is designed to emphasize the infinite variety that reigns in the world which God created: why then should it be supposed that there can be only one kind of human body, the one with which we are familiar in this life?”

V. 42: “So also [for] the resurrection of the dead. It is being sown in decay, it is being raised without decay”

In recognition of these obvious realities, it should be without serious



question or disputation to realize that “in like manner the dead, when raised, shall have bodies which differ from their body of humiliation” (Farrar, 491). There will be no earthly variables, features, or conditions to which the resurrected body will be subjected.

V. 43: “It is being sown in dishonor, it is being raised in glory; it is being sown in weakness, it is being raised in ability”

The indignity of being born from dust and returning to dust will be dramatically offset by the presence of God and His ability to pull off unimaginable changes which will literally be “out of this world.”

V. 44: “It is being sown a natural body, it is being raised a spiritual body; if it is a natural body, it is also a spiritual body”

The natural body is animated by natural life; the spiritual body will be animated by spiritual life. There will be no “corporeal desires or intellectual and passionate impulses, but wholly dominated by the Spirit, and therefore has no desire or capacity to fulfil the lusts of the flesh. The existence of one is no more impossible than the existence of the other” (Farrar, 491).

V. 45: “Even so it is also written, **The first man Adam became a living person**, the last Adam a life-giving spirit”

All of this is in total accordance with salvation history or the role of God’s salvation throughout history. Paul’s appeal or reference to Gen. 2:7 seals the deal. The first Adam created deadly consequences which fell upon all his natural, once-born descendants. As the last Adam, Christ created life-giving possibilities and consequences which fall upon all His spiritual, grace and faith-based, twice-born descendants. The first Adam brought death. The last Adam brought life.

V. 46: “But not the spiritual first, but the natural, then the spiritual”

In terms of sequence, human beings entered this earthly life first, and only after that could they enter the spiritual life. This is just another way to punctuate the splendor and startling reality of his focus on the resurrected body.

V. 47: “The first man [was] made of dust of [the] earth, the second man from/out of heaven”

The first man, Adam, originated from or was “made of dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7), while the second man, Christ, originated from heaven itself. How can there be any sensibly minded person to not see the utter simplicity and significance of this truth?

V. 48: “As is the earthy, even so also those made of dust, and as is the heavenly, even so also those who are heavenly”

Just as all human beings are earthy, having been made of dust, so those are heavenly who have received new life from above. All human beings resemble their first father, Adam. All Christians are to resemble their heavenly Father Who revealed Himself in the incarnation of Jesus Christ for their salvation.

Again, to ensure that our understanding of Paul’s posturing is correct, a one-liner should assist: “Grace and regeneration begin the change; the resurrection consummates it” (Lenski, 728).

V. 49: “And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly”

Paul keeps circling the wagons with the same point but from somewhat different standpoints. Here, he stresses that “to bear the likeness of anyone was to share or reproduce his nature” (Moffatt, 263), and his application to the earthy first Adam and the heavenly last Adam cannot be misunderstood, unless truth is off the table and the texture of his words are twisted beyond recognition.

Apart from the resurrection, none of what he is writing will occur. Paul began by saying that the resurrection is a must in order for the spiritual body to come into being. He now ends by saying that this will actually occur.

V. 50: “Now what I mean is this, fellow Christians, that flesh and blood cannot inherit [the] kingdom of God: i.e., the decaying part of us is not being able to inherit what cannot decay”

After all, since the natural body is made of flesh and blood in this life, this natural body is not qualified or able to be a participant in the kingdom or reign of God in its heavenly realm, due, of course, to its decaying nature. “Flesh and blood” are that “decaying part of us” in which sin originated and operates. The consummation or completion of the kingdom of God on this earth and its celestial continuation in heaven will be free from any decay components “because sin is excluded from its very nature” (Lenski, 734). No wonder the emphasis and accent in these verses is focused

on the salvific resurrection of Jesus and His disciples. No wonder that Paul bursts forth in a doxology or praise for the victory which God achieves in this salvific resurrection.

4. Praise for Victory (15:51-58)

V. 51: “Behold I am telling a mystery to you, all of us shall not undergo sleep, but all of us shall undergo change”

“Behold” (*idou*) is an imperative verb which means to pay close attention to what he is saying. It is about a “mystery” (*musterion*) or “something formerly concealed but now revealed to Paul and through him” (Berquist, 129) to his readers. In other words, “it does not signify a puzzle which man finds difficult to solve. It signifies a secret which man is wholly unable to penetrate (by himself) but which God has now revealed” (Morris, 55).

The verb “undergo sleep” (*koimethesometha*), as noted earlier, is a euphemism for experiencing physical death. But, “all of us will undergo change” (*allagesometha*). The change will be the transformation of both the living and the deceased to receive the resurrection body. In other words, “that such a change is impending for the dead in Christ is evident from the foregoing argument but Paul adds to this the declaration that *it will extend to those living* when the Last Trumpet sounds” (Findlay, 941).

V. 52: “in a moment, in a blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet, for a trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised without decay and we shall be changed”

This change will occur with lightning speed: “in a moment” (*atomoi*) or a “flash,” rather than a long, drawn-out process of osmosis. This word occurs here only in the NT.

The expression “in a blinking of any eye” (*en ripei ophthalmou*) indicates lightning speed like “the flapping of a wing, the buzz of a gnat, the quivering of a harp, the twinkling of a star” (Robertson, 198). This is also the only occurrence of this word in the NT.

The word “last” trumpet denotes the final event on earth, the termination of life’s affairs on this planet. This “trumpet sound” will indicate something like a war-trumpet to signal and command attention to the task at hand. Here, it denotes the positive transformation about to be implemented – “the dead shall be raised without decay.” That is, their former natural body while on earth will be raised in a spiritual body which is without the body’s natural components of flesh and blood.

Then the “we” who are alive at that moment in time will also be changed from the natural body to the spiritual body. It will be resurrection for those Christians who had already experienced physical death and rapture for those who are alive at the time.

V. 53: “For this decaying part must put on what cannot decay and this dying part must put on what cannot die”

For both, these natural bodies will “put on as a garment” (Robertson, 198) that spiritual body which cannot decay and experience death. The word “put on” (*endusasthai*) means to put on like a garment or piece of clothing. The word “cannot die” (*athanasian*) means what is “immortal” or incapable of death. The word occurs only one other place in the NT: 1 Tim. 6:16 to describe God Himself.

V. 54: “And when this decaying part is able to put on what cannot decay and this dying part what cannot die, then what the scripture says, **Death has been swallowed up in victory**”

The word “swallowed up” (*katepothe*) means to devour, to drink or swallow down. So, the resurrection reverses all the damage that life and death had created. Death has failed for the final time and it is none other than the salvific resurrection itself which prevails. “In the end *death* is abolished so that it is conquered” (Grosheide, 394). It is the “final and unqualified overthrow of the King of Terrors” (Findlay, 942).

V. 55: “**Where from you, death, [is] your victory?**  
**Where from you, death, [is] your sting?**” [will be fulfilled].

“The serpent death has lost his poison fangs” (Robertson, 199). Paul borrows a chorus from Hosea 13:14 and bursts forth in a song of celebration which portrays the harmlessness of death and the spiritual surgery upon death as the “malignant adversary” (Morris, 234).

V. 56: “Now the sting of death [is] sin, and the ability of sin [is] the law”

The sting which death brought about is sin; sin is the arena in which death had captured and imprisoned people; sin brought about death.

And that instrument which sin used to bring about sin and death

was the law (Rom. 5:12; 7:7ff). The law itself was never meant or given to bring about salvation from sin. “Indeed, by setting before men the standard which they ought to reach but never do, it becomes sin’s stronghold. It makes sinners of us all. It condemns us all” (Morris, 235).

V. 57: “But thanks to the God Who is giving to us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”

But what God did in Jesus Christ satisfied the demands of the law (Gal. 3:13) and thoroughly deposed sin and death granting us “victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The former victory of sin’s sway leading to death has now been conquered by a new and final victory over it. Sin, death, and the law are now swallowed up in victory by the salvific resurrection of Jesus Christ. He rose from the dead and conquered the forces of evil (Rom. 6:9f; 8:11).

The present tense of the verb “giving to us” indicates that God “is even now giving us the victory and will become ours more and more (Rom. 8:37)” (Grosheide, 394).

“The full use of the title *our Lord Jesus Christ* heightens the sense of the majesty of His Person” (Morris, 235) and depicts as none other could do, “exultant triumph through Christ over sin and death as in Rom. 7:25” (Robertson, 199).

V. 58: “Therefore, my beloved fellow Christians, all of you must keep on being firm or steadfast, immovable, overflowing in the work of the Lord [since you are in the state or condition of] knowing that your labor in the Lord is not senseless”

Having refuted grave errors about the grave because of the salvific resurrection of Jesus Christ, his tender love for his readers cannot fail to be delivered: “my beloved fellow Christians.”

So, instead of succumbing to the wayward ones who dangled before you their doubts about the reality of resurrection, keep on stepping up to the plate of steadfast immovability and energetic, wholehearted devotion without being led astray by their lies and myths and fables.

Rather, their firmness in the faith must be fixed and focused on their permanent knowledge that their labor in the Lord is not now and never will be without complete and unconquerable significance. It is service and ministry in the Lord’s work while on the earth but will carry eternal meaningfulness when they depart this earth because of the salvific resurrection which He accomplished and in which His disciples will participate. The Christian’s “resurrection

from the death of sin to the life of righteousness is a pledge of your participation in Christ's resurrection from the grave" (Farrar, 493).

Indeed, "since Christ has been raised bodily, they too will one day be physically transformed. Therefore they should remain unwaveringly committed and totally dedicated to the work of the gospel – the purity of living and the faithful exercise of their distinctive avenues of service. No matter what the cost in this life, they can count on the ultimate triumph of all God's people and all his purposes" (Blomberg, 317).

#### E. Several Concluding Matters (16:1-24)

This section touches on Paul's practical plans from a number of different perspectives, and his concluding comments and exchange of greetings.

This overview of this part of the letter provides valuable perspectives on its content: Vs. 1-4: Directives on the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem; Vs. 5-12: Paul's travel plans; Vs. 13-14: Paul's pertinent commands or imperatives for the Corinthians; Vs. 15-18: The value of being partners in Christian ministry; Vs. 19-21: The appropriateness of paying respects; Vs. 22: The daring pronouncement upon those who do not love the Lord; Vs. 23-24: Passionate expressions of God's grace and Paul's love.

##### 1. Poor Saints in Jerusalem (16:1-4)

V. 1: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, just like I gave directions for the churches of Galatia, you must provide in the same way"

The word translated "the collection" (*tes logeias*) may be traced back to Egypt in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and is found among various papyrus documents and inscriptions among various members of guilds for mutual or common interests and purposes which required contributions for maintenance purposes (Deissmann, 142).

Usage here, of course, is related to financial contributions from the churches he played a role in establishing for the poor saints or Christians in Jerusalem (cp. Gal. 2:10; Rom. 15:25-29; 2 Cor. 8-9).

The word "for" (*eis*) "represents the dative of advantage" (Deissmann, 117); i.e., for the benefit of those Jerusalem Christians.

Apparently, the church at Corinth was lagging behind the other churches. Of course, "when a church is preoccupied with its own petty problems it is blind to a needy world. Strife stifles stewardship. Now Paul commences to prod and pressure the Corinthians to get their promised offering assembled" (Berquist, 134). Indeed, Paul is calling

upon them to reawaken their concern and act accordingly.

Paul gave specific directions to the other churches in Galatia as to how they should implement this token of regard for others, and he now lays down the same four principles for structured stewardship for those in Corinth:

V. 2: “on the first day of every week each one of you must lay aside, (treasuring up at home) whatever he may have prospered, in order that no collections may be made when I may come”

1. Regularity: “first day of every week” – This, of course, would be Sunday when the Christians regularly met for corporate worship.
2. Responsibility: “each one of you” – This matter of stewardship was not for the well-to-do but for everyone, regardless of their financial status.
3. Readiness: “lay aside, treasuring up at home” – Rather than an *impulsive* act of giving, each one was to “have a *prepared* sum *ready* to pay into a central fund” (Barrett, 387). This, of course, would require readiness from their home where conscientious planning and contemplation of one’s desire to give could take place. Indeed, “something must be put aside at home by each head of the family” (Craig, 256).
4. Requirements: “whatever he may have prospered” – This refers to the amount each person contributes: nothing is specified - no mention of tithing or any reference to the law ; it is proportionate giving. It is determined in accordance with one’s income: “to whatever extent one is prospered” (Blomberg, 324). As Barclay (163) observes: “A man never satisfies his Christian duty by discharging the obligations which he can legally be compelled to fulfil.”

Paul’s words, “in order that no collections may be made when I come,” denote his urgent purpose in it all: “no delay” (Bengel, 270).

By following these four principles in advance of Paul’s eventual arrival in Corinth, they would avoid last-minute panic, chaos, and confusion over *when, who, how, and how much* variables. As Findlay (60) observes, this systematic and strategic manner of ministry “would avoid the unseemliness and the difficulty of raising money suddenly, at the last moment.”

V. 3: “And whenever I may arrive, whomsoever you may have approved, I shall send them with letters to carry your goodwill to Jerusalem”

Those who give are to be the ones who decide who will carry their goodwill offering to Jerusalem. In Bengel's (270) words: "The *contributors* choose the *carriers*. Paul will send with them "letters" to serve as an introduction of them to the church in Jerusalem.

V. 4: "And if it may be proper for me to go also, they shall go with me"

The "letters" may not be needed, of course, if circumstances wind up being such that Paul himself goes; in which case, "they shall go with me." This would be the sure-fire, certain, or definite way to avoid or "to meet all suspicion" (Bengel, 270).

Vincent (289) suggests Paul's meaning is that it may be better for him to go "if the gift be sufficiently large to warrant an apostolic journey to Jerusalem." Blomberg (325) agrees: "an adequate sum of money to justify the time and not to embarrass himself before the church leaders in Jerusalem." Robertson and Plummer (387) also agree: "He could not abandon other work in order to present a paltry sum; and an Apostle could not take the lead in so unworthy a mission. It would look like approving niggardliness." Alford (622) also concurs with this conditional component.

## 2. Plans for Travel to Corinth (16:5-12)

V. 5: "Now I myself shall come to you after I have passed through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia"

In this verse, and verses 6-7, Paul draws a contrast between his mere passing through Macedonia on his way to Corinth and his "intended longer sojourn at Corinth" (Beet, 308).

V. 6: "But having become possible, I shall remain with you or even spend the winter, in order that you may send me forward wherever I may go"

Paul did not want to make simply a night-over visit with the Christians in Corinth since there were issues to address which required as much time as possible. His reference to possibly even spending the winter there is simple enough: traveling during the winter months was not advisable. In fact, according to Acts 20:3-6, he did stay there for three months.

Also, as part and parcel of the customary practice in those days, he desired and, evidently accepted, their "favour of accompanying a departing guest for a short distance" (Acts 15:3; 17:15; Rom. 15:24) –



“a proof of affection” (Farrar, 550).

As often occurred in his life, Paul had to make changes in his plans as to where and when he would go to a certain destination. Uncertainty was then, and continues today, to make necessary changes in travel plans. This is included in the word “wherever” (*hou ean*).

V. 7: “For I do not want to see you just passing by the way, for I am to remain with you for some time if the Lord may allow”

Paul reaffirms his dislike or distaste for a fly-by-night with the Corinthian Christians. Again, his desire was for a longer stay, and as noted in v. 6, he did stay with them for the three months. The phrase “if the Lord may allow” (*ean ho kurios epitrepse*) denotes that his desire and plans are dependent on God’s will (cp. 4:19).

V. 8: “And I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost”

Presently, however, he plans to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost. Pentecost was celebrated 50 days after the Jewish Passover in which the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the early disciples occurred and the worldwide mission of the Church began. This would be sometime in the Spring.

V. 9: “because a large and active door [of opportunity] is opened to me, and [am] being opposed by many enemies”

The primary reason behind his staying in Ephesus is that “a large and active door [of opportunity] for preaching the gospel in Ephesus is his-for-the-taking and he will not abandoned that opportunity, despite the opposition “by many enemies.” Exactly who these adversaries were is not definitively known, but likely consisted of both Jews and Gentiles (cp. Acts 19).

V. 10: “Now if Timothy may come, you must take care that he may be with you without fear. For he is working the work of the Lord even as I myself am”

In 4:17, Paul notes that he had sent Timothy to Corinth. However, Paul’s letter would likely be received before Timothy arrived which is why he recommends him in this letter.

Timothy, of course, although somewhat young and timid (1 Tim. 4: 12), was a close co-worker with Paul. In fact, Paul compares the quality of his work as being on equal par with Paul himself. He was

no second-rate substitute but an admirable servant and excellent example of Christian discipleship.

V. 11: “Therefore, do not treat him with contempt. But you must send him on his way in peace, in order that he may come to me; for I am expecting him along with the brothers”

Again, despite his “youth,” and the fact that he was known to the Corinthians already by his previous accompanying Paul in Corinth, Paul charged them not to treat him with any degree of disrespect, contempt, or disdain.

Bruce (160) “suggests that Timothy’s personality was diffident rather than forceful, and that those who judged superficially would not be greatly impressed by him.”

So, Paul recommends that they were to do everything they could to take care of him and make sure that he is able to come to Paul in as peaceful a manner as possible.

Who these other “brothers” were is not sufficiently clear to state.

V. 12: “Now concerning Apollos the brother, I greatly encouraged him, in order that he may come to you along with the brothers; and it was not at all his will to come now; but he shall come when it may be time”

One thing that is clear, however, is that Paul and Apollos were not opponents in a competitive edge over who should be the most popular or the favorite. He, in fact, could be among those “brothers” who accompany Timothy to their city. It seems that Apollos was not in Ephesus at the time Paul wrote this letter. But “he shall come” at the appropriate time.

### 3. Pertinent Commands (16:13-14)

V. 13: “You must stay alert, you must stand firm in the faith, you must act like a man, you must be strong”

The four commands or imperatives in this verse “are directed respectively against the *heedlessness*, *fickleness*, *childishness*, and *moral enervation* of the Corinthians” (Findlay, 949-950). They are present tense verbs which speak of on-going, continual, progressive actions. The one in v. 14 likewise is present tense and speaks directly to their need for spiritual progress: i.e., specific ways to combat their spiritual poverty.

1. “stay alert” (*gregoreite*) – This is not referring to the absence of sleep but determined efforts toward spiritual wakefulness. It denotes “vigilance so that their spiritual liberty may not be endangered and so that the fine edge of their spirit may remain sharp and keen, not compromising with anything in their environment, or playing with any temptations that would make them less sensitive to spiritual things” (Short, 259).
2. “stand firm in the faith” (*stekete en te pistei*) – This refers to “the stability of the Christian faith firmly grounded in Christ, a stability distressingly absent from the Corinthians” (Morris, 243). So, “when under attack, stand fast in the faith and yield not an inch” (Barclay, 166). “Faith” is first mentioned in this letter in 2:5; 12:9; 13:2, 13; 15:14, 17. It is the act of commitment to God through Jesus Christ whereby its significance is to be understood and manifested in action.
3. “act like a man” (*andrizesthe*) – This refers to the need to be mature and act as responsible Christian adults. As Morris (243) notes: “they are engaged in a desperate strife with the forces of evil, and it is therefore imperative that they play the part of men.”
4. “be strong” (*krataiousthe*) – This is strength that comes only from God Himself. “Like a well-equipped and well-trained soldier, be strong to fight for your King” (Barclay, 166).

V. 14: “All of you must function in the sphere of love”

5. “function in the sphere of love” (*panta humon en agape ginestho*) refers to the all-encompassing, “all-pervading nature of Christian love. Nothing we do is outside its scope” (Morris, 244). Paul, of course, in ch. 13, explained in detail the essential actions by which this type love is recognized and by which it is to be regulated. Again, this verse “reiterates the appeal of chh. 8 and 13, touching the radical fault of this church” (Findlay, 950). It is this sacrificial, selfless type of “love” which “must govern all of life [and which] will restore every relationship” (Grosheide, 402).

#### 4. Partners in Ministry (16:15-18)

V. 15: “Now I am urging you, brothers - you know the household of Stephanas, that it is [the] first fruits of Achaia and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints -

Paul begins this verse but does not complete it until v. 16. As he reflects on the first converts to the Christian faith in Achaia, he explodes with joy over his reflections about those converts – “the household of Stephanas” (1:16; 16:17). They were superb examples

of Christian love in action. The particular manner by which their love was manifested is seen in that they “‘set themselves’ [as] contrasted with appointment by others to this work” (Gould, 146) - they did so as volunteers.

Stephanas and his household were likely converted to Christianity during Paul’s first visit to Corinth (1:16). So, “this family deserved to be recognized as such, especially because they had been of assistance to the church, perhaps by hospitably opening their home” (Grosheide, 402).

Indeed, the words “addicted themselves” (*etaxan heautous*) reveals their voluntary role and their commitment and devotion to Christian service/ministry. In fact, the word *etaxan* means “to determine . . . with no possibility of resistance” (Delling, 28).

This word occurs here only in this letter. However, it is used elsewhere in the NT: Mt. 28:16; Lk. 7:8; Acts. 13:48; 15:2; 22:10; 28:23; Rom. 13:1.

V. 16: “that you may also addict yourselves to such [people] and to all fellow-workers and laborers”

Now, Paul picks up with the object of his “urging” in v. 15. The contents of this urging are spelled out in this verse.

As the word *tasso* was used in v. 15 for the household of Stephanas, a form of that word, *upotasso*, is used here as Paul calls upon the Corinthians “that you may also addict yourselves” to people like Stephanas “and to all fellow-workers and laborers.”

This word appears earlier in this letter: 14:32, 34; 15:27 (thrice), 28 (thrice).

The word means “put in subjection; to subordinate; to be under the authority of; to addict; to devote.”

“Apparently, the church members had failed to treat this worthy family with due respect” (Beet, 312). This may also be the reason why Paul broke with his custom, and personally baptized them (1:16). Such addiction or subordination is the essence of Christian service or ministry. So, “all fellow-workers and laborers” should receive “the deference which befits their services to the church” (Ibid.).

The terms together “suggests the weariness which frequently accompanies Christian work. To every toiler for Christ we must give the deference due to his work” (Ibid.).

V. 17: “And I am rejoicing over the arrival of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus because they supplied what was lacking on your part”

Paul now is “rejoicing over the arrival” of Stephanas and extends to Fortunatus and Achaicus the same rejoicing-recognition he has given to Stephanas. Who these two were is not clear; they are mentioned here only in the NT. What they did is noted in v. 18. They somehow filled the void in Paul’s life which the church at Corinth did not do.

V. 18: “For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore, you must recognize these men”

They somehow “dissipated the uneasiness which filled the apostle’s heart” (Godet, 467). They somehow also did the same for the church at Corinth. What Paul meant is left without other particulars. Nevertheless, they should somehow be recognized. As Short (260) notes: “There is always a special place in the church for the devoted servants of Christ. The church needs them; it owes much to them. They are the members in whom the Master manifestly reveals himself. Others in the fellowship do well to be subject to them.”

5. Paying Respects (16:19-21)

V. 19: “The churches of Asia are sending you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house sends you greetings in the Lord”

The word “Asia” refers to Asia Minor, which is east of the Aegean Sea. Reference is likely to the seven churches of this area which are in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> chapters of the Revelation. Paul had not personally been to all seven churches [i.e., Laodicea, Colosse, Hierapolis: Col. 4:13] but was somehow relatively familiar with them and their conditions.

Aquila and Prisca had provided a home for Paul and for the church (Acts 18; Rom. 16:5). Their greetings were sent, along with those of the church, “in the Lord” – a common Christian greeting.

V. 20: “All the brethren are sending you greetings. You yourselves must greet one another with a holy kiss”

The brethren who were with Paul in Ephesus send their greetings as well.

The “holy kiss” “was a token of unity. It was restricted in that men kissed men and women kissed women to indicate their unity with one another. How well this limited practice survived in practicality has been the subject of various studies – and results.

Nevertheless, Findlay (952) notes that it is still practiced “by the Greek and Eastern Churches but died out in the West from the 13<sup>th</sup> century . . . occasioned by its abuse in the decline of Christian simplicity.”

V. 21: “The greeting in my own hand: of Paul”

Paul’s personal autograph is used to authenticate its genuineness. It was customary of Paul to use an amanuensis or secretary to write what he dictated, and then to add his personal signature at the end.

6. Pronouncements (16:22)

V. 22: “If any one does not love the Lord affectionately [even as a friend], he must be accursed. Maranatha.”

The condition which exempts one from being “accursed,” is having at least an affectionate regard for the Lord. That is, instead of using the word “agape,” Paul uses the word “phileo.” The absence of this affectionate kind of love is viewed by Paul as that of “*heartlessness* – human affection to the Master is wanting, to say nothing of higher feeling, as with Judas and his traitor kiss” (Findlay, 952).

The person who does not even have this lower degree of “love” for the Lord “walks on devious ways and is under God’s judgment” (Grosheide, 406).

According to Zahn (305), “When [Paul] thinks of the disturbers of peace in the Church and its destroyers, of its unskilled workers and hostile critics, his mind turns to the day of judgment (3:13-20; 4:5): Lord, come and put an end to all strife, and to all the activity of hostile forces in Thy Church.”

7. Passionate Expressions (16:23-24)

V. 23: “The grace of the Lord Jesus [be] with you”

This is Paul’s favorite farewell to his readers. But the “unworthy are excluded” (Bengel, 273).

V. 24: “My love [is] with all of you in Christ Jesus”

Transitioning from affectionate, friendly type love (v. 22), Paul exclaims his sacrificial, selfless type “love” (*agape*) for his readers. This word indicates “Paul’s intense interest in the church at Corinth

which he loved fervently in spite of all her sins” (Grosheide, 406). This exclamation of Paul’s love for “all of you in Christ Jesus” left an assurance which was drastically needed by the church. Such love was not, “strictly speaking, *with* those who ‘love not the Lord’ (v. 21), nor with those who ‘destroy the temple of God’ (3:17), nor with the culprit of v. 1-5)” (Findlay, 953).

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